

THE
INDISCRETIONS
OF
LADY ASENATH

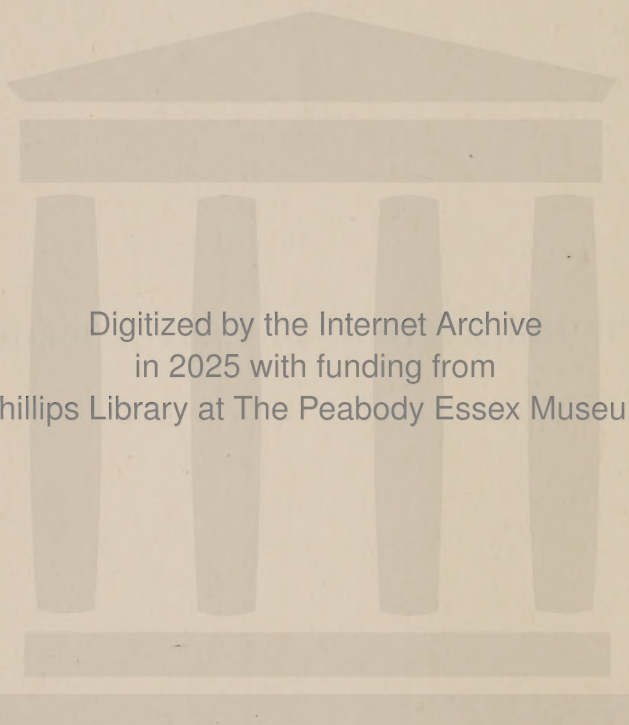
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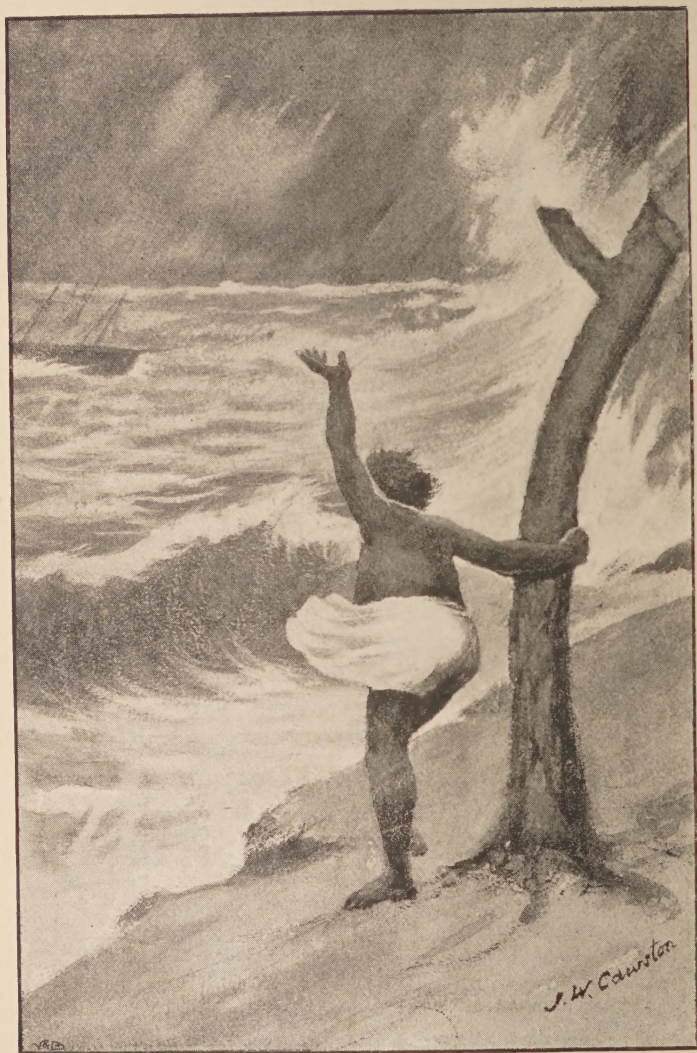


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The Indiscretions of Lady Asenath



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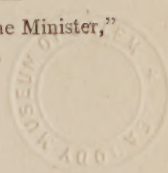
"WAFT HER HITHER! MY SHIP! MY SHIP!"

The Indiscretions of Lady Asenath

By

Basil Thomson

Author of "The Diversions of a Prime Minister,"
"A Court Intrigue," etc.



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TO
William Ernest Henley

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IT was my fortune to spend some years among the persons described in these pages, and if their conduct should seem occasionally lacking in decorum, I must plead that they are sketched from life by one lacking the skill to draw them other than they are. Though the South Sea heroine, I know, should be a young and seductive creature not older than eighteen, I make no apology for mine, who would have made none for herself. Instead, she would have taken to her warm, pagan heart such of her readers as cared for her friendship, and would have smiled indulgently upon the others, whose censure could not have wounded her even if she had not passed over to a place whither censure cannot reach. In life she enjoyed a courtesy title—*Andi*—of which “Lady” is the just English equivalent.

If there be any cynics who think the wholesome piety of Bishop Wesele and Chaplain Michael

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overdrawn, they may compare their portraits with the originals, for both are still at their posts. In breaking down a customary law which was obeyed, and substituting a Christian code which offers no immediate penalty for disobedience, civilization sees the Fijians sitting bewildered among the ruins of their ancient polity; yet, the simple sincerity of these two, and a few others like them, proves that the gulf between the old order and the new is not too wide to span.

Had not Cicero once cause to warn a friend against procuring his slaves from Britain because "the people are so stupid and unteachable that they are unfit to enter the household of Atticus" ?

B. T.

Dartmoor, 1898.

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THE INDISCRETIONS OF LADY ASENATH

PROEM

THE plain of Nandi, lying snugly walled within her semi-circle of mountains on the western shores of Great Fiji, has a right to be proud. It may flatter the conceit of folk of the Eastern Isles to pretend that culture and refinement linger farther up the path of the trade wind, and to speak disparagingly of the western folk as savages. But little does Nandi care, nursing her self-esteem in contemptuous indifference to Gentile opinion. In truth she is justified.

Far back in the misty ages, Lutunasombasomba and Dengei, the founders of the Fiji race, stepped ashore on her northern borders from their tempest-driven barque, the *Kaunitoni*, before ever their descendants made Ancestor-gods of them, and wove myths around their story: so at least an

INDISCRETIONS OF LADY ASENATH

ancient tradition declares. Her low-lying shores were swept by the only reputable tidal wave that ever devastated the islands. They were, too, the last lingering place of the cult of the water-sprite, Luveniwai, before the missionaries frowned down the practice of his mysteries. But if Nandi ever become the goal of pilgrimage, it will be for the notable persons who did her the honour of being born there. Naaman, most eminent of self-made men, drew his first breath under the shadow of Mount Koromba. The cure of Nandi souls—no empty sinecure, you will admit, if you read further—fell to the task of Bishop Wesele, noblest of prelates. Just beyond her southern borders the Prometheus, Kaikai, struggled for liberty. On her haunted isles Peter the Wrecker was visited by an immortal spirit. And beside and above all these, the Lady Asenath, whose renown is ocean-wide, whose example has founded a school of Epicurean philosophy, has shed upon the bay a reflected glory, of which nothing but the oblivion which swallows up the noblest names at last can ever deprive it. If my poor quill may withstand the injustice of posterity, even for a single day, it will not have been driven in vain.

In Narewa, the capital of Nandi (The Shallows), built for defence upon a site reclaimed from the salt-pans in the innermost recess of the bay, the

PROEM

Lady Asenath found her first home. She was not born there, because the Nandi mothers are too wary to bring forth children in the abodes of men, where any malicious sorcerer may steal from the belongings of child-bed enough to compass the death of mother and babe by witchcraft. Her mother, when her time drew near, slipped quietly away to a little shed built secretly in the bush, and there on a bed of dry grass, attended by no one but her own mother, brought forth her child, and carried it home in a basket in the morning, after fire had destroyed every vestige of her simple shelter. Had she been of humble station she would have chosen her own bed among the reeds, and fulfilled her destiny alone, with no witness but the stars and no roof but the vault of heaven. But the birth of a chief's daughter demanded as elaborate preparations as was consistent with safety in a land where witchcraft is so cunning that men wrap their cigars in tough pandanus leaf, and stick the unburnt stumps in their mop of hair for fear of dropping an ash that would furnish sorcerers with material for their spells.

There were great rejoicings when the infant Asenath was carried home. Oiled and powdered thick with turmeric, she fell to upon her first meal, a mouthful of candle-nut juice, which made her very sick. Then, for three days, she was consigned

to the wet nurse, and on the fourth her mother sat with her to receive the presents from her loyal people. She cost her country dear, for the yam harvest was not yet, and there must be feasts for each of her accomplishments:—the feast of the tenth day; of the “turning,” when she could turn over on mat; of the “crawling,” when she first progressed by wriggling. As she grew, she was made to suffer for her rank, for she was “forbidden the sunshine.” Her playfellows might go fishing in the shallows, or wallow in the warm mud of the salt-pans, but she must chafe in the gloom of a darkened house, bleaching her brown skin. Also, being of noble birth, she might not wear any clothing until the initiatory feast was made, and it chanced that a period of great scarcity deferred this ceremony long beyond the fitting age, so that for nearly two years, though grown to womanhood, she dared not venture out of doors until the night had veiled her. Then some peeping Tom might have caught a glimpse of a bronze statue fleeing to the cover of the mangrove to vent her pent-up girlhood in lonely gambols. It is in this strange childhood that I like to find excuses for the Lady Asenath’s sympathy with youth, her love of midnight frolic and her perennial girlishness.

She came of an original stock. Of her father, it is true, there is little to be said, for he died fighting



"WHEN THE NIGHT VEILED HER."

for his country while her years were still tender. She related his fate without emotion :—" He was clubbed when the sun was setting, and the chiefs of Sambeto ate him." It may be, the parental hand would have moulded her character differently : possibly for the better, probably for the worse. But her grandsire Navula, the Moon, who, being a Government pensioner, lived to see his great-grand-children enter manhood, was a man of great decision and resource. It was he who paid the English missionary who received him into the Christian fold, a compliment which the mission journals have been ungratefully slow to acknowledge. The rites of hospitality had demanded the preparation of a feast. Meaner spirits would have been content with the sacrifice of a few hogs, but Navula's haughty soul revolted at so commonplace an entertainment. So, when the Rev. Mr. Kelly stepped ashore, and advanced smiling to the village square where the feast was piled, he guessed from Navula's self-deprecating air that the entertainment was to be on a princely scale. He was right. Ten elongated bundles were arranged artistically about the pile of cooked yams, and something familiar in their shape caught his attention. Could it be ? No, it could not ! Ah, but what was that peeping from the leaf wrappings ? A human foot ? Yes, the bundles were ten human bodies, fresh-

browned from the oven. The story always ended there, and, accepting the Wesleyan missionaries' repudiation, I had set it down as a trader's lie, until I questioned Navula himself upon the point. Here is his reply :—" When the neighbouring chiefs turned Christian they did not honour the foreign chief as he deserved. I desired to do him signal honour, and to that end I sent forth the young men to Nandoi before daybreak to bring in meat. The Nandoi people were disobedient, therefore it was just and right. But when the foreign gentleman saw the meat, he wept, and besought me bury it."

The only incident in Asenath's youth into which I dared inquire was her marriage. She had espoused her *ndavola*, the man to whom she was born betrothed : that is to say, her father's sister's son, who, when Navula's growing eccentricities won him a Government pension, succeeded to the Bulship, and discharged his functions very creditably, until a painful difference with Naaman, his superior officer, drove him into exile. A bright-eyed, cheerful little man was Ratu Luke, who used the liberty accorded him by his wife with grateful and unassuming freedom. Nandi felt but little change when he went into banishment, for the reins of social government still remained in the same light, feminine hand, and the round of gaiety rolled on without a break.

I

THE LADY ASENATH GOES A-FISHING

I THINK it was a week after my first introduction to her that the messenger brought me my invitation. It was a pleasure party, arranged in a hurry, and trusting to charity for the implements of sport. We were all swells from the Nandi coast : the Lady Asenath, of course, distinguished not less for her wit and cheerfulness of character than for the levity of her early life, and the sometimes disconcerting breadth of her conversation ; Ruth, who defended her charms behind a wall of demure reserve ; and the Pussy-cat—she bore a Scriptural name which I now forget—who had earned her nickname by a certain kittenish quality that was considered infinitely attractive. The Lady Asenath, as the founder of the expedition, had invited the rest of the party : Banana-Insect, a tall, lively, if somewhat wild cousin of hers ; Red-mouth, a canoe-man of repute ; and Dog-Tooth, an elderly gentleman of consequence, who, having

been a missionary leader until he was dismissed (for no fault of his own, he said), lent a certain ecclesiastical sanction to a party whose extreme liveliness might otherwise have been viewed with disfavour by the Church. There were, I think, besides, two boys to stop the leak ; but they were kept forward, baling under Redmouth's orders, and did not therefore count for anything in the company. The voyage to the island, with a fair wind and a smooth sea, was joyous to the extreme edge of propriety, and I had frequently to remind myself that my object in accepting this invitation was purely scientific, that I had come at considerable personal inconvenience in the interest of knowledge to observe the habits of the balolo, and that I was not responsible for any levity in the behaviour of those with whom I was temporarily associated ; but my companions, leaving all cares behind them, were out for a jaunt, and had a right to enjoy themselves in their own way.

As soon as Asenath knew that I was interested in the balolo she had arranged everything : had borrowed the canoe from the Buli's brother ; had victualled her with provisions for the crew—leaving me, of course, to provide the more generous of the fare ; had fixed the hour for departure ; and had invited a set of guests whose armour of discretion had as yet repelled the shafts of calumny, yet

whose code of ethics frowned not overmuch upon the sportiveness natural to youth. If at forty-nine the Lady Asenath had been sobered by the lapse of years, she must in early youth have been of a livelier habit than I cared to imagine. Being a lady of exalted rank, she had none of the restraint of conversation that moulds the manners and the speech of middle-class society ; she had an admirable candour and frankness in expressing her thoughts ; she preferred the society of the young, especially the young of the other sex, whose humours and desires were a delightful study to her now that the saplessness of age left her no selfish interest in them ; she loved that influence over young destinies which the entertainment of a train of well-born damsels gave ; she was an inveterate match-maker, holding it her mission to impart the wisdom of Epicurus to the young in language more pointed and less refined than the philosopher's own. She had a pretty wit in repartee, with an inexhaustible store of old saws and allusions of a well-weighed obscurity, which shook the sides of bystanders, while it left her interlocutor in helpless ignorance of her meaning ; and she told smoking-room stories with a terseness and point that would certainly have called the blush into the cheek of her most hardened young persons, had the colour of their skin permitted the change to show.

At midnight of the third quartering of the October moon, the balolo had sent up his advance-guard—a frayed cord of worms, spreading out in ragged patches over the surface of the sea, torn, worried, and gobbled by the greedy fish or ever a canoe could reach them. This advance-guard, though, is no feast for man, who simply notes the day, spears a gorged fish or two, and prepares for the greater festival to come. As the month passes the fisher tribes toil day and night at caulking and strengthening canoes, plaiting baskets, darning mat-sails, and sharpening fish-spears; and on this eight-and-twentieth evening no one slept. Beacons flaring on the beach guided the mainland canoes to the landing-place; for all who can claim cousinship with the owners of a balolo reef are bidden without invitation to the sport. The women were busy with their cooking pots; the guests sat in groups on the sand, tribe by tribe, each by its fire; the children, unmindful of the gruff reproofs of their elders, scurried among the canoes at the water's edge in shrill play; and ever and anon a spurt of flame from a dry palm-frond would redden the great limbs of the men, and throw their shadows in gigantic distortion upon the screen of leafage behind. There was no sign of haste; the reef was near, not a worm would show before midnight, and after that there would be more than enough for all.

Meanwhile the pot was cooked, and minutes flow the faster for eating and drinking.

The balolo, the unwitting cause of these elaborate preparations, lives his life fathoms deep in the fissures of the coral reef, rising twice a year to the upper waters only to die phoenix-like in the propagation of his kind. Being but a worm—mere living vermicelli as it were—with no head but a mouth, and no body but a transparent pipe, he might well enjoy the inglorious security of any other marine annelid, but for one remarkable quality. The balolo is a natural almanac, he has a fixed day for his appearance, and he will not turn therefrom for all the hurricanes that ever raged south of the Line. In the mere observance of seasons and fixed intervals there would be no greater miracle than our own bodies can show. The wonder lies in the fact that the balolo keeps both lunar and solar time, reconciling and adjusting them at regular intervals. The balolo swarms to the surface on two nights in the year, the nights of the third quarter of the moon in October and in November, and has never departed from the time during the forty-eight years it has been watched by Europeans. The moon directs its choice of the day, the sun its choice of the month ; and it follows that the creature cannot maintain regular intervals of either twelve or thirteen lunations without chang-

ing the calendar month of its re-appearance. For two years it rises after a lapse of twelve lunations; every third year at the thirteenth. But since even this arrangement will gradually sunder solar and lunar time, it further intercalates a lunation once in the twenty-eight years. What are the immediate impulses of tide or of season that move it to rise on its appointed day, and keep it back every three and every twenty-eight years, no theorist has yet essayed to show. It is certain that the balolo "keeps its dates," and that evolution has not yet impelled it to lapse from what is practically a self-destructive habit.

Consider for a moment how many centuries must have passed before the Polynesian had become so impressed with the balolo's regularity as to give its name to their calendar! On the nights of the "Little Balolo" in October, and the "Great Balolo" in November, you may scour the reefs in a fast canoe and see nothing. The merest chance must first have brought the fisherman into a balolo shoal; years must have passed before a second chance again revealed its habits to man, decades before the unmethodical intellect of savage humanity had come to look for the annual recurrence, and had noted the day and hour. The little worm keeps to its own reefs—sea reefs seldom bared by the tide—fringing the outlying islets that

THE LADY ASENATH GOES A-FISHING

ring the larger islands of the Western Pacific. Yet the great annual feast, of which it is at once the provider and the provision, had given names to two months in the unwritten calendar of the Fijians before any European came among them.

Wandering about the village, I chanced unseen upon the quarters assigned to Banana-Insect. The Lady Asenath, over-solicitous for his comfort, had come with her train of damsels—displaying every artifice of coy unwillingness—to tuck the skirt of his muslin curtain under the mats, on the plea that the persistency of the mosquitoes of this island was notorious. “Look at her,” she said, girding at the pretty Pussy-cat for her unforwardness; “look at her! Why, when I was a girl we had not to be pushed to do services for the chiefs.” (In very truth I secretly doubted if Asenath had ever had to be pushed to anything save sobriety of demeanour.) “There is no longer any spirit of gaiety among these girls. Outwardly they poison all pleasure by sham propriety; in secret it is far otherwise. Now I remember—” I confess to a feeling of relief when her reminiscences were cut short by the entry of a grave personage whose white shirt denoted him an officer of the Church. The Lady Asenath showed not a flutter of the eyelids. “As I was saying—and Amos here will bear me out—the girls now-a-days are not as they were in our

time: they are distressingly wanting in piety; their behaviour is light, and few of them are regular communicants." Amos assented cordially, himself expanding into reminiscence, and the conversation took on so gloomy and demure a colour that I sought my own hut, and, lulled by the murmur of wind in the palm-fronds, and the overtone of the wavelets tinkling on the shingle, I fell asleep.

The scratching of a finger on my sleeping-mat and the reiteration of *Yele!* in a gruff voice awoke me. Dog-Tooth had been schooled in good manners, and knew better than to call a sleeping chief by name. "The canoe is launched, Momo; they await only you before hoisting sail." He rustled strangely as he moved about in the darkness collecting our traps. "My fishing dress," he laughingly explained, laying my hand upon a vast girdle of green leaves that encircled his waist. The moon in wane was climbing the dome of a cloudless sky, flooding the sea with light, glinting silver gleams from the shining fronds of the palms; only in the eastward a black bank of cloud marked the birthplace of a rising wind. The whole population of the village was assembled on the beach. The tide had turned, and the canoes were all afloat, held stem to seaward by men waist-deep in the waves. Other fellows were racing down the sands with forgotten gear—baskets, paddles, and spears;

while the crews shouted to them to make haste. Our craft was straining to be off: the sail, shaken out for the hoisting, was flapping impatiently in the steady breeze; the men were in their places, stripped to their girdles of leaves; Asenath and Ruth, perched on a pile of baskets, cried to me; strong hands seized me, and flung me by their side. "*Vakarewa!*" (hoist) shouted Dog-Tooth, who held the steering oar. The halliards creaked in the holes, and the curved yard crawled up the mast, blotting out half the world as it rose with the great bellying sail. The shore slid away from us, the running figures dwindled, the ragged wall of palms shrunk inwards uncovering star after star, the glare of the fires waned. We were off.

The wind whistled about our ears; the water, churned under our prow, broke with a swish against the carved deck-head, and slid from our slippery sides to boil about the steer-oar in a wake of foam. The great outrigger tore through the waves like a torpedo, and now diving inches deep, now torn free with a savage wrench, grooved the water like a gouge, trailing a silver streak of phosphorus in its wake. Redmouth had taken a pull on the main-sheet, the canoe heeled to the breeze, and Dog-Tooth's body stood at a sharp angle, with every muscle braced against the strain of the steer-oar, and patient stress in every curve

of his outline, an unconscious embodiment of the harnessing of the elements to the needs of human feebleness by human will. As we cleared the eastern cape we gathered speed; our little craft skimmed the surface like a swallow; the great mat-sail lifted the frail hull like wings; the water scarce felt our weight; we were flying through the air as only a Fijian canoe can fly.

Like sea-birds driven from their perch by an advancing tide, sail after sail spread to the breeze and took flight behind us, till we could count fifteen in the level rays of the rising moon. The wind was freshening, and old Redmouth, alert to every overtaking squall, let the sheet strain inch by inch from the cleat. The outrigger barely touched the water now, and the foam of every wave-top surged over the lee-board as the deck took a sharper angle. The cross-beams groaned in their sinnet lashings; our faces were stung with salt spray; our little craft plunged and laboured between waves that seemed double their real height for the darkness. Redmouth's spirits rose with the wind, which he chided and challenged with impious and provocative derision. "Well done, child of the lady of Kadavu" (a wave crashed upon the deck drenching us). "Thou liest! Come, try again! On board this time!" (The wind obeyed, and a couple of baskets were



"THE GREAT MAT-SAIL LIFTED THE HULL LIKE WINGS."

washed overboard.) "Well done, well done, a good wind!" Drenched to the skin, expecting every instant to be fighting for life in the water entangled in the rigging, I held on by the mast and prepared to meet my fate. The girls were frightened too, but they had survived so many reckless canoe voyages that they made no sign beyond cowering down, drawing their sodden clothes tighter about their naked shoulders against the spray. Close-hauled as we were, we had fallen to leeward of our course, and I heard with consternation that we were to go about on the other tack.

With a strong wrench on the steer-oar, Redmouth brought the sail flapping into the wind, dragged the oar on to the deck and ran to loose the mast-stay. Old Dog-Tooth was already in the bows with Banana-Insect, fumbling with the lashing of the yards, while the boys baled unceasingly. And now, heaving upwards with all their might, they raised the foot of the yards, and therewith the weight of the leaning mast, and came panting, slipping, staggering aft with their great burden, clinging with their great toes to the carvings of the deck, while the sail flapped loose in the wind, and the frail hull plunged sullenly in the trough of the sea. "*Tuku!*" they shouted breathlessly to Redmouth, as Banana-

Insect slipped and fell on his knees. The mast was now vertical, and the skill lay in paying out the backstay so as to lighten their burden without checking their advance. "*Tuku!*" he shouted, paying out the rope cautiously. In a lurch of the canoe the two men slipped and fell again, but they never loosed their hold, and with the thud of the yards in their new sockets on the stern deck plank came safety. Redmouth made fast, and ran to drag the steer-oar to its new rowlock; Dog-Tooth came trampling aft to haul on the sheet; the sail bellied, the hull careened an instant with the pressure, righted, leaped to the impulse, and shot forward through the foam on the new tack, her sail turned inside out, her former stern converted into her cut-water. We, the non-combatants, dared to breathe again, so seldom is this complicated manœuvre, due to the necessity of keeping the outrigger to windward, performed in a choppy sea at night without some accident.

Behind us, one after another, the whole flotilla went about; we could hear the shouts of the crew faintly from down-wind, as the spiked sail of the rear canoe collapsed in confusion and vanished. From the weather-bow came a steady roar; the water grew smoother, though the wind abated nothing; we were under the lee of the reef. And

now the moon, an hour above the horizon, showed us the fishing-ground, a mile of still water, guarded by the ragged wall of coral, within whose bowels the balolo had lived its life until to-night. Then, while Banana-Insect plied the scull to counteract the wind, the sail was lowered and secured out-board by its forked prop. In feverish haste the ropes were coiled away. Every man seized a punt-pole from the bundle that lay across the outrigger. We, the first on the fishing-ground, could not afford to have our portion filched through clumsy handling!

The ladies, who throughout the transit had allowed the sense of their superfluosness to damp their spirits, now began to take their proper place again. To be ranked by the inferior sex as deck-lumber, a little lower in usefulness than a pile of baskets, to be in peril of drowning and perchance to suffer the early pangs and cold sweats of sea-sickness, must have a depressing influence upon even a Lady Asenath. Thus pent for an hour, her spirits rebounded with accumulated energy. It was no time for dalliance. The excitement of the coming sport had taken hold of her. As she tore away the lashings of the fishing baskets, her joyousness broke forth in muttered witticisms which must have filled the crews of the other craft with envy, to

judge by the peals of shrill laughter they set loose.

We could touch the bottom now with the punt-poles, and as we crept nearer to the reef I stared hard at the oily water for some sign of the balolo. Deeply disappointed, I appealed to Asenath, busy with her baskets. She and the girls laughed loudly. "Plunge your hand down, perhaps you will feel them," the lady said. "Another of her ill-timed jokes," I thought, but dared her noisy ridicule by doing as she bade me. For a moment I felt nothing but water warmer than the air; then a little thread of gelatine twined about my fingers like the tendrils of a plant, slid from them, and drifted away in the wake of the canoe; then came another, then two together; then a little compact body of a dozen, interlaced like vermicelli in clear soup. These I grasped and brought up, slithering away between the joints of my fingers. "That's it," cried the girls in great excitement, redoubling their efforts to free the baskets; "the balolo, Redmouth: this is the place: the foreigner has caught some!" If, in the blushing honours of the first catch, I hoped for some recognition from old Redmouth, I was disappointed. He only grunted and drove his pole more firmly into the coral, fixing his eyes on a spot in the water

before us. He was an old hand, this Redmouth, a fisher of balolo for some forty years; and he knew every wrinkle in the sport.

Now the water seemed to be growing viscous and treacly, no longer breaking into wavelets from the surge upon the reef. Then suddenly Redmouth's gruff reserve all vanished: he let fall his pole, and pranced about the deck like a ten-year-old, shouting unintelligible dialect to Banana-Insect in the bows. No less moved than his elder, the youth dragged out a great stone, solidly bound with lines to form an anchor, and flung it with all his force into the sea. With the sounding splash hundreds of fish lurking in the dark water—long, arrow-shaped garfish, clumsy sankas, agile kanathes, and big-headed, villainous rock-cods—tore the surface in a criss-cross of phosphorescent grooves, like a shower of meteors in November. "Let the foreigner come," cried Redmouth on his knees, forgetting his manners in excitement as he peered into the depths. Kneeling beside him, I tried to see what he saw. "Where, where?" "There," he shouted, pointing slantwise into the water with a crooked finger. "The root of the balolo; the very centre of it. Look! It is growing from the reef. Often have I heard tell of this; never till to-night have I chanced upon it."

As my eyes grew accustomed to the dancing of the water, I certainly did see something, but so faintly that I scarce dare now assert that I saw it. The surface was oily and viscid with the interlaced bodies of millions of tiny worms, that felt slimy to the touch as one stirred the water. Near the canoe there were breaks in the mass ; and through these there faintly appeared a moving stalk or pillar, about the thickness of a man's thigh, coiling from the surface downwards out of sight. The whole stalk oscillated, expanded, and contracted, like the funnel of a waterspout, and its motions stirred the phosphorescence so as to make it faintly visible. At its capital the worms were so thick that they broke the skin of the water, and the pillar seemed to be a fountain of worms spouting from some chasm in the reef.

And now the fishing began. Crew and passengers alike, with shouts of laughter we all went to work to scoop up solid masses of the worm-bodies in our baskets, letting the water drain away, and dumping the gelatinous mass bodily into the hold. Other canoes drew up near us, and shouted their congratulations upon our choice of a fishing-ground. Amid such abundance, it took no long time to fill our hold deeper than the safety of the return voyage warranted. The men had their fish-spears out, for all about us great fish, stupid

from surfeit, flapped their fins idly on the surface. More than once the boys jumped overboard to secure a fish impaled by a spear ; and once the girls, dripping already, and stripped to their leaf girdles, skylarked in to their assistance. It was an orgy of rapacity and greed. The animal kingdom compacted like the joints of a telescope. Shoals of salala gorged themselves on balolo ; sankā devoured the salala ; rock-cod swallowed the sankā ; a cunning shark or two assimilated the rock-cod ; and man, as usual, preyed upon all alike.

I was recalled to my duty by the clink of a glass jar against the deck. The natives have it that if the balolo be found broken up into short joints before daylight, there will be a hurricane between January and March ; while Europeans hold that the balolo always breaks into joints. Beyond this, the admirable monograph of Mr. Whitmee being as yet unknown to me, I knew nothing of the creature's eccentricity. I had come to observe him in confinement, and the first dip of my glass jar brought up eleven worms, six brown and five green. With a lantern beyond the vase I could watch them perfectly. They swam incessantly with a spiral motion, the short ones (six inches long) having two screw turns, and the long ones at most three. Fished up by the finger and thumb

and crushed, they broke spontaneously into short lengths at their jointings, and each length wriggled about in the palm of my hand. In the case of the green worms, from the broken ends of every joint poured a stream of tiny green eggs, which under the magnifying-glass showed a faint whitish spot on each. From the fractured joints of the brown worms poured a milky fluid. In this way the question of sex seemed to be at rest.

By daylight several of the canoes had weighed and hoisted sail for home, mere specks against the hazy bank of land ; but we, adhering to Ascnath's agreement with me, stayed on to see the last of the balolo. At ten minutes to eight by my watch there came a change. The balolo scooped up in millions by the baskets, torn and worried by thousands of ravenous fish, seemed still as numerous as ever ; but they were more active. Under the light of day they could be clearly seen in dense patches, with individual worms bridging the clear water between them, the closest masses even writhing and -churning the surface of the water. At ten minutes to eight they began to disintegrate and break up, and in a few moments the sea became so turbid and milky as to hide them from view. My captives in the glass vase measured the time for themselves, and behaved precisely like their fellows in the sea. After moving more

actively for a few moments, they gave a convulsive wriggle or two, and broke up into half-a-dozen joints apiece, which went wriggling about near the surface, squirting their contents. At the very moment that the sea became discoloured, the vase looked as if a teaspoonful of milk had been emptied into it, and I saw the little transparent envelopes of the fluid sink empty to the bottom, just as the green worms, discharging their cargo of eggs, began also to settle down, leaving nothing to show that ten minutes ago they were organized animals with the power of motion. Then, after a few minutes' immersion in the fertilizing fluid, the eggs themselves began to settle gently to the bottom, until they lay among the withered husks that had given them birth and being. The sea too had cleared, and not a trace was left of the myriads which had clogged its waters. The balolo had passed into a new generation.

With a fair wind and a following sea, our little party gave the loosest rein to their lightness of heart. While the boys scraped up from the leaky hold water milky with the crushed worm-bodies, the girls wrapped their charms against the impertinence of day, and flirted shamelessly with Banana-Insect. Redmouth bandied repartee with Asenath; and old Dog-Tooth at the steer-oar even broke into song—strangled, it is true, by the necessity of

gripping his cigarette between his teeth while he sang. It suited Asenath's sportive humour to be the first to tempt me with balolo toasted with her own dusky hands in the pot of sand that did duty for a galley. Considered as a breakfast dish at sea, the lump of green worms, writhing and spitting in the heat, albeit served on a banana leaf, went near to compassing my disgrace. Had I succumbed, it would have been useless to assert that it was the motion of the vessel ; so I am proud to record, that the native heroism of every Englishman in moments of trial did not fail me, and that I shut my eyes and swallowed the brutes blindly. They tasted like oysters with a flavour of herring-roë, and when I came to know them afterwards—delicately fried in butter and served on toast—in the compact masses that are baked in ground-ovens, and sent all over the country like slices of wedding cake, I ceased to wonder that the balolo fishing is a great annual festival, and that the poor green worm is reputed to surpass fresh Russian caviare.

"The foreigner is going to wish," said Asenath slyly to the girls. "Foreigners always wish when they taste a new food."

"A safe voyage home!" I cried, imitating the toasts at a kava-drinking.

"What a dull wish," said Pussy-cat, pouting ; "perhaps he does not like balolo?"

"I do," I retorted stoutly. "It is good enough. But tell me why you Fijians make such a fuss about it?"

"I honour the balolo," said Asenath, "because he gives you boys and girls an opportunity for amusing each other without having your fun spoiled by the elders;" and she glanced at Dog-Tooth.

"Balolo fishing is a good thing," said Banana-Insect with enthusiasm. "This is my first fishing. Last year I was in gaol because of Ana"—the girls chuckled—"for two years before that I was a policeman of the Government. It is good. Next year I shall come again."

"If not in gaol because of Ruth," whispered Asenath in my ear.

"And I," said Redmouth stoutly, "like the balolo, because one comes not from it with an empty net as with other fish. It has an honest mind, and is regular."

"And I," said the Pussy-cat, simmering with giggles, "because it makes true fishing, and prevents the youths from being too cheeky." The Banana-Insect must have pinched her, for she had to interrupt her confession to slap him.

Old Dog-Tooth sang on cynically to the wind. We were almost serious, and I snatched the

moment to impart my scientific discoveries as I had been a very Mr. Barlow. I told them how the balolo hatched and lived deep in the crevices of the coral for twelve months. "That we always knew," interjected Redmouth. I showed them how the colour of the worms indicated their sex; how the brown were males, and the green females; how, when their breeding drew near, the green worms swelled with eggs and rose at last, obeying a common impulse to hand on their lives to their progeny; how at daylight, by a voluntary act of self-immolation, they disjointed their bodies and died, leaving their eggs to float for a time in fertilizing fluid, and then sink gently to the coral bottom, there to hatch and found a new generation.

I knew that my hearers were bored; and I exulted, for they deserved the feeling, and in teaching them I was convincing myself that my theories held water. I even recalled the Pussy-cat's wandering attention with a stern reproof, before I attacked the mystery of the balolo's almanac. I explained the difference between solar and lunar time, and showed how the balolo was guided by both in his choice of a day for his mysterious rites; how he was obliged to skip one lunation every three years, and an additional lunation every twenty-eight; and at last, in the very middle of an

improving peroration on the wonders of Nature's works, I had to pause for breath.

"Listen to him," cried the Lady Asenath; "this is the way of foreigners. They come and weary us with questions about trifles, and then they turn on us and craze us with teaching as though we were an infant school!"

II

THE LAFO MATCH

IT happened that the Bishop chose the moment for his first visit to me when my partner and I were in the throes of victory at a lafo match. He courteously entreated us to finish our game, and was so keenly interested that he yielded to our importunity to take a hand himself. He was a high-voiced, jolly, black-bearded man of forty-five, with a face a little marred in intention by the loss of an eye; and he had a bustling original way with him that had marked him for shepherd of a flock so recently added to the fold as the mountaineers of Viti-levu. His native name was indelicate, but having been baptized Wesley, after the founder of his Church, he was generally known as Wesele, the nearest Fijian equivalent. He was not a bishop, of course,—the Wesleyan Church abhorring episcopacy,—but since the veteran missionary chairman himself was playfully referred to by the mission organ as the “Methodist

Bishop," and Wesele had as good a right to the title in virtue of his originality, his single-minded piety, and his manifest authority, I shall call him bishop for the purpose of this chronicle. Moreover, his duties of sustaining the weaker clergy, of checking the over-zealous, of whipping in the laggards, of visiting and preaching in every hamlet of his sprawling see, were essentially episcopal.

It was the Bishop's misfortune that his diocese comprised the little quasi-military post of Fort Carnarvon, built after the war to keep the long arm of the Government before the hillmen's eyes, and garrisoned by armed native constabulary recruited from distant provinces. The camp, as the centre from which civilization was to radiate, had always laid claim to home rule in ecclesiastical matters, and having its own domestic chaplain, the excellent if over-tolerant Michael, it had ever resented episcopal dictation. Soldierly in all countries is gay and licentious, and it must be admitted that, despite Michael's improving example, the kind of civilization that radiated from the camp was not such as any self-respecting bishop could approve. Once a week the mail orderly brought from the capital—seventy miles off—the latest scandal and the newest ribaldry fashionable among the young bloods of the native garrison; and flash young mountaineers coming

in to deal at the canteen store, would shock the greybeards of their villages by reciting over the evening fire lampoons upon those they ought most to reverence—the missionaries, the high chiefs, the very Governor himself. Moreover, all the soldiers depended for petty luxuries upon adopted “mothers,” who were shamefully youthful in appearance, and were more than maternally solicitous for the comfort of their foster-children.

Now the Bishop, as a man of the world, knew very well that he could not hope to take this stronghold of ungodliness by assault. He knew that it must rather be reduced by a cunning appeal to the lower instincts of its garrison than by one to those higher yearnings in whose existence there needed an effort of faith to believe. It was a proud citadel of Antichrist, impregnable to all operations but the undermining strategy of blameless guile. He could not, as a bishop, openly countenance licentious kava-drinking or excessive smoking; but he could traffic with vice so far as to close his one remaining eye to foster-mothers, who had yearly been growing younger for the part, the better to vindicate the authority of the Church, when he had established such relations with the mammon of unrighteousness that his position in the citadel had become unquestioned. I knew every detail of his plans, because the stout chaplain,

Michael, finding himself between the devil and the deep sea—if one may apply without disrespect the figure to a bishop—had invoked my friendly advice as to how he should steer a middle course between his duty and his personal comfort. The Bishop had threatened him with penalties unless he betrayed the fortress, and Michael, in his perplexity, revealed the plot to me. “And Wesele hopes,” he concluded, “that perhaps we may save a soul or two while consorting with the soldiers.” I knew, therefore, why the Bishop had turned so muscular a Christian ; why he had linked little fingers with the unregenerate Corporal Peter ; why he travelled and preached so much that he might almost be called a case of foot-and-mouth disease ; why he was so loud a patron of cricket and athletics, and so soothing a critic of the fact that the whole garrison boasted but one Communicant, who trembled ever on the brink of dismissal. I knew what lay behind his jolly tolerant laugh, and I watched him with amusement, changing into respect for his pluck, his cunning, and his tenacity of purpose.

The Bishop affected to be so deeply enamoured of lafo that, when it was proposed to form a Christmas lafo sweepstake, in which every one, officers and men alike, should draw for partners, pay a shilling entrance fee, and fight his way to the possession of

the pool, he implored me in his jovial way to allow him and Chaplain Michael to join. Knowing how lafo tends to excitement, irritation, and language that one is sorry for, I objected that the sweepstake should be limited to inmates of the camp, but he playfully carried his point, saying—"We too, sir, should be counted as inmates of the camp in respect of your souls, of which we have the saving." There was no fear or favour in the drawing of partners, and the Bishop drew my Solomon Island cook. I felt the incongruity more than he did, and hinted at a compromise ; but he would have none of it. The cook was his partner, and they meant to win, he said. Besides, had they not had the luck to draw the bye ?

In lafo, an ancient Tongan game, the partners sit at opposite ends of a long shiny mat, each with an antagonist at his side, and endeavour so to spin their discs of oiled cocoanut-shell that they stop at the extreme edge. When your adversary's disc is cleverly posted, a very nice judgment is needed so to regulate the force of your throw as to topple it off and leave your own in its place. I will not linger on the details of the competition. I, no mean player, drew native officer Abel, the best thrower in camp, and we fought our way steadily up to the final. By some incredible fluke the Bishop and the cook had worsted their antagonists,

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and we stood to play them for the pool. The lafo house was crowded, the excitement was intense. Every throw produced a deafening shout from the backers, and many indefensible expressions were used without calling forth the slightest reproof from the crowd of ecclesiastics who had come to encourage their spiritual chief. Lafo is scored something like tennis. You begin at six, and count to ten for each game, and the best out of five games makes the set. The Bishop and the cook both threw their discs at a venture, and played havoc among our well-ordered pieces at every throw. The game was two all, nine all. I had three of my pieces ranged at the extreme edge of the mat, and the Bishop had his last disc to throw. Only a miracle could save him from defeat, and it was not a prayer he uttered as he let drive. Never shall I see such another stroke. It was a wild, random shy: the disc tripped, rolled over, kicked my largest piece in its death-struggle, and hung see-sawing on the lip of the mat a hairbreadth winner, and the Bishop and the cook, amid vociferous congratulations, divided the pool—22s. 6d. apiece.

I do not think that in that supreme moment of triumph the Bishop realized how much chance had to do with his victory. His cloth, his schemes for compassing our salvation, and his temperance

vows all went to the wind together. He drank a bowl of kava with the Blue Ribbon mutely grieving on his shirt-front, and I felt I liked him the better for it. In his boyish enthusiasm he wanted to challenge the whole world, but I had had enough of lafo, and had no wish to see him shamed before his flock. Well, it was Christmas time! Were we to let the festive season pass unmarked? What did I say to races? He could bring into the field students of divinity who could beat the best of us at swimming, diving, running, throwing the cricket ball, or even wrestling, if we would. Nay, but we would have a Christmas dinner, and he himself would provide the snakes—the true mountain dish. Then some one spoke of cricket; but the Bishop had seen the game, and demurred. It was no game, he said, for untaught prowess such as his young men could boast, but rather for a niggling skill. Was there no other game? There was! But a few weeks before some enthusiast had imported a football, and had set himself to teach the game to the garrison in Suva. Most of the men had seen it played there, and a second ball had found its way to the camp. We had played a few games with the thermometer at eighty-seven, and football might have waxed in popularity but for the fact that the injuries to naked feet had so swelled the sick list that there were never enough

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men to fall in for fatigue duty on the day following a game. In the interests of discipline I had discouraged the sport, and for six weeks the ball itself had lain rotting in the armoury.

At the name of "kickball," uttered by some one at the prompting of the Father of Evil, the Bishop's heart leaped within him. He knew the game by reputation. It was a noble game, where victory was to the swiftest, and no swifter than his young men. Ah! how they could run! Kickball was like a battle, like wrestling on the move where each man grappled with whom he could. It was a game for warriors—nay, for gods! Little knew the poor Bishop how the mantle of prophecy had fallen on him, how soon his idle metaphor of the battle-field was to be cruel reality.

The matter was out of my hands now! The native officer was expounding the Rugby rules, and the Bishop listened with growing excitement while he ticked off his team on his fingers. He was disappointed that the side must be limited to fifteen, and that Man-o'-War was to play for the camp. Man-o'-War was the Lady Asenath's nephew, kept the canteen store, stood six feet four in his bare soles, and was lithe as a snake, wiry as a cat, strong as a bull. He owed his name to the fact that, on the day he first saw the light, one of her Majesty's cruisers had happened to choose the waters of his

island for her weekly gun practice—an event that had deeply impressed his parents, conscience-stricken in respect of the wreck of a schooner they had plundered. “If Man-o’-War plays,” said the Bishop, “he will run round us with the ball until he encounters Michael near the goal. Either he will over-leap him like a flying fish, or he will butt at his stomach like a he-goat. This will go very ill with Michael, for there is none other in all the world so fat and scant of breath.”

During the next week I heard the Bishop preach but once. From a fighting text in the Psalms he expatiated upon the healthfulness of competition, the nobility of outdoor exercise, and the Divine sanction for war. Even the Duke of Wellington, of whom he had read in the pages of Na Mata, had declared that the Battle of Watalu was won upon the playing-fields of Etoni. Who could say that some historian of the Angel Host would not trace the victory in the fight for souls at Fort Carnarvon to the great match of Thangi-moli—even kickball?

III

THE DEVIL'S GAME

IT was all the Bishop's fault. But for his love for outdoor sport and his belief in the soul-saving influence of healthy competition, a mild Rugby game might still be played on Saturdays under the shadow of the mountains that encircle Fort Carnarvon in Fiji. But the great match of *The Church v. The Army*, for which I assert the Bishop alone was responsible, has made the very name of football a by-word throughout the mountains; so that men sink their voices and glance furtively towards the door when they utter it, as becomes loyal Churchmen and citizens when they are constrained to recall a shameful story of civil tumult and disorder. It was a cruel irony that so far-reaching a disaster should trace its origin to a paltry game of lafo, a mere parlour pitch-and-toss to make the evening pass. Yet if it had not been for the lafo sweep-stake it is certain that the Church would have left

the prowess of the soldiery unchallenged, and so an unspeakable scandal would have been averted.

The revels were held on Boxing Day, so as not to interfere with the Church services. By ten o'clock all the youth and rank of the neighbouring villages were assembled on the slopes commanding the beautiful cricket-field on which the contests were to take place. It was a glorious day; a faint air swayed the plumes of the bamboos. The fierce rays of the sun sucked the moisture from the juicy earth in a simmer of live heat dancing over the reed tops; the very air currents seemed the mere product of over-heating, like the blast of a furnace. The ring of hills in the middle distance was blurred in outline by the tremulous haze, but the towering background of the Mongondro range was unnaturally distinct. It was as if one looked through a glass focussed on the horizon. The thermometer stood at ninety-four, and the spectators panted and sweated under the awning, and thought only of the plunge they would have in the cool river that brawled below, hidden by the screen of feathery bamboos.

The races excited but a languid interest, when it was seen that every event must fall to one or other of the soldiers, for mountaineers are not built for swift progression on the flat. Even the Ladies' Race, for which the Bishop had found three com-

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petitors, his own fair daughter Mary and two damsels from the Sunday School, produced but little excitement, for it was whispered that Mary was only half-hearted in the contest, having been caught overnight flirting with a divinity student in the episcopal kitchen, and scored across the back with the weals of discipline. At length the wrestling came, the last event on the programme ; and three brawny young privates strode out into the open to challenge the mountaineers. They were tackled at once by hulking fellows from Mongondro, who suffered themselves to be gripped at a disadvantage, swayed a moment, and crashed down, leaving the victors to slap their biceps with crossed arms in derisive attitudes of challenge. Three others followed and met the same fate ; then the two principal champions of the mountaineers worsted two of the soldiers, and Corporal David was left to defy the world. There were signs of excitement among the mountaineers who squatted in the sun. Out of their hearts they despised the warriors from the coast, and here was one of them insulting them with hand-flaps, laying their doughtiest champions in the dust while they sat impotent. How were these insults to be borne at the very navel of their country, when a few paltry club strokes would clear every impudent invader from their valleys ?

Corporal David added a comic strut to his defiance, and the murmurs among them grew louder. They sent forth no more champions but glared loweringly, and drew their feet under them to be ready for a rush. I whispered my fears to the Bishop, who stepped nobly into the breach. "I am too old to wrestle myself," he said plaintively, "but some of my young men shall grapple with David." One after another these martyrs in the cause of peace went forth to meet their fate, until the ground was strewn with students of divinity, and David's insolence began to grow monotonous. But the diversion had its effect: the laugh was turned against the Church, and the mountaineers forgot the outrage to their pride, and joined in it.

Now the study of divinity does not attenuate the baser human passions, and there was evidence that the Bishop's young men did not take their public humiliation with meekness. They still said "Sir" when they addressed a soldier, but there was a faint excess of emphasis on the word that smacked of irony, and when the feast came to be shared, they took their portion away to eat apart, and ate sparingly. I saw that they looked to football to refurbish their tarnished honour, and as none of them had ever played the game before, I thought it well to summon both teams before me, and recapitulate

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the most important rules of the game. Touching lightly on the mysteries of off-side, of passing the ball, of kicking in touch, of tries, of converting, I gave them a practical illustration of the best way to collar a man, and advised the Church team to turn up their toes and strike with the ball of the foot when they kicked, if they would avoid dislocation. Then I solemnly adjured them all to respect two rules—never to seize a man by the hair or to grab him by the waistband. Practical experience had taught the native garrison in Suva that the girdle and the red curls of a runner, whose skin is slippery with oil and sweat, are the only sure hand-hold, and without these rules a row, in which the ball has no part, invariably ends the match.

At half-past two the great parade-drum was beaten to summon the spiritual and temporal forces to the field of battle. A long procession of spectators could be seen streaming down the mountain paths into the valleys to swell the ranks already massed six deep along the boundaries. All the “mothers” of the soldiers, past, present, and prospective, were there to cheer their foster-sons to victory. They could be distinguished from the rest by the enormous palm-leaf fans with which they shaded their complexions from the sun’s impertinence, by a certain coquetry in their demeanour, by the *déshabillé* of their scanty pinafores,

and by the discreditable length of their locks ; while the ladies who had come to put heart into the Church team, were cropped to the scalp as exacting propriety demanded, and were further screened against licentious admiration with a natural homeliness enhanced by flowing garments of rusty black and trade umbrellas. The cool breeze of the morning had died away ; great woolly clouds clung to the mountain tops, and the earth seemed to pant for the rain-storm that was gathering behind them. The naked backs of the players mustering under their leaders glistened with perspiration, their hearts and lungs laboured in the stifling heat before they had run a yard. And now the Bishop himself strode on to the field and began to marshal his men, a fine sturdy team, but wanting the leanness that regular drill and fatigue duty had imposed upon the frames of their opponents. At this late moment I appealed again to the Bishop to abstain from the fray. I told him that until he had seen a scrummage he could not realize how disastrous it would be to the personal dignity demanded by his high office. I even urged that a starched white shirt is not the garment in which to play a football match on a hot day. But he was deaf to all my arguments. His young men depended on him for encouragement. If he deserted his Church when her honour was at stake,

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who would fight for her? The chief pastorship of the flock required him to wear a starched shirt, and he had an infirmity that made him but a poor runner; he would, therefore, play full back with Michael, and take command of his team from the rear, where he had a better view of the fray. The rest would sort themselves.

The home team fell into their usual places with the gigantic Man-o'-War three-quarter back, and steady old Sergeant Thomas full back. The Army won the kick off, and while Lance-Corporal Ham was placing the ball, I think the Bishop prayed; at any rate, the forwards cast their eyes upwards, and their lips were seen to move. Corporal Peter rushed at the ball, landing it a terrific kick, and spun round in an agonized pirouette with his injured toe in his hand, for he had forgotten my advice to lift his toes out of harm's way, and to strike with the fleshy ball beneath them. There was a moment of hesitation among the spiritual forces. They were trying to remember the right thing to do. "Seize it, boys," cried the Bishop cheerily; but the divinity students were looking at the ball much as one looks at some strange reptile which may have a sting or venomous teeth hid somewhere about it. The enemy was thundering down upon them, and, forced to the act by the Bishop's frantic cries, one of them stooped and

lifted the ball delicately. In a moment the blameless youth was struck down where he stood, and buried half a fathom deep in a writhing flood of friends and foes, and a wail went up to heaven—"Ae! Ae! I am injured, I am slain!" But there he was, caught red-handed with the ball secreted beneath him, and the soldiers gave him no quarter. It was time for the umpire's intervention, and his authority prevailed. Liberated from the superincumbent mass, the injured student still lay feebly moaning on the ground, "Ae! Ae! Lest I die!" and the scrummage formed without him. The temporal forces bore all before them, and the opposing line wavered, broke, and was whirled away like driftwood before a flowing tide. The ball shot beyond them towards the goal, past the shouting Bishop, straight into the grasp of Michael, the chaplain, who, having been long shut out from communion with his own feet, could not be expected to kick with precision or run with passable agility. He could only wait the onset with placid resignation. Ham was leading the attack, and Ham was so rough and hard and bony that he seemed to have an external skeleton, like a crustacean. The shock could be felt rather than heard. As the cruel blade of the harpoon buries itself silently in the shrinking blubber of the great cetacean, so Ham's bony shoulder smote Michael in the very centre of his

rounded prominence, and laid him low. The chaplain bore his agony in silence, and the wave of men swept past him, lying motionless like a sunken rock.

The honour of the side now lay in the Bishop's hands alone, and, with his unfailing resource, he prepared to face the impending danger. Ham, he knew, would not kick a goal, but he might certainly obtain a try. He girded up his loins, and sped back towards the line, venting a stream of loud ejaculations intended to rally his scattered forces. The ball, as he expected, had shot off at a tangent and crossed the line. It was a race between a determined Bishop and a breathless soldier, and there would have been no doubt about the result, had not a figure, tall as a column, now shot from the ranks of the Army and borne down upon the ball with prodigious strides. Covering two of the Bishop's paces in one of his, the figure fell upon him as he stooped for the ball, and they rolled over one another in shrieks of laughter. It was impossible to say which had first touched the ball; both vehemently asserted their claim. The umpire, chosen because he had twice played the game in Suva, knew no more than the rest. But he had learned the first business of an umpire:—to give a decided opinion, whatever the merits of the case; and he declared judicially that it was no try. "What?"

cried Man-o'-War in indignant astonishment; "no try when I touched it first?" "Wesele touched it first," said the umpire calmly. "Not a bit of it! Ah, well, if you are going to side with the others and give everything against your own party, do so by all means." And Man-o'-War stalked off to his own goal and changed places with a full back.

The Bishop had much to say to the students before the kick-off. They had come to know that there was a harder mistress in the world than Divinity, and that her name was "Kickball." That Michael might add his weight to the admonition, the Bishop drew them to the part of the field which the chaplain had chosen for his sick-bed, and there strenuously admonished them. Meanwhile the Army grew impatient, and a soldier cried—"Let us too have a service." And another—"Nonsense, it is a funeral. They are burying Michael." There seemed to be a new spirit in the Bishop's young men. When the ball was kicked off, they followed it in phalanx, with despairing courage in their faces. Enoch, the fleetest of them, snatched the ball in mid-air, tucked it under his arm, and ran easily round the soldiers set to intercept him. There was no one in the field to touch him but Man-o'-War, and he was sulking in his tent. But Enoch had chosen a diagonal line, and was headed off from the goal till he sidled aimlessly into the corner of

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the ground, and threw the ball to a friend. On him the soldiers fell, David and Simeon and Ham, and every second brought fresh recruits to the scrummage. The students fought doggedly, and blood was running hot, when the ball was heeled out and crossed the boundary. Thrown in again, the scrummage closed upon it. A student tried to escape with it, but was felled, and fortune swayed from side to side. And now the Bishop, dancing up and down behind the scrummage, conceived a plan. He saw that the struggling mass was within five yards of the line, and if the ball broke away, it might never again be so near achievement. If some weighty propulsive force could be applied at the rear of the fighting crowd the entire scrummage might be shoved over the line together and a try be scored. He looked behind him, and saw Michael's bulk limping towards him ready to his hand. He caught him by the shoulders and shoved him like a battering-ram towards the scrummage, gathering speed for the impact. The effect was irresistible. The scrummage, already loosening, was jammed tighter than ever, and inch by inch it yielded, till it fought and struggled over the line itself, and collapsed at last on the farther side. The Bishop claimed a try, and the umpire, who gave his decisions on fixed principles, allowed it. The Bishop himself carried out the ball, and posted

Enoch to convert the try into a goal. Enoch rushed at it as he had seen David do ; but his bare toes refused their office, and he merely shuffled it right into the hands of Private Ebenezer, who, having a constitutional dislike to responsibility, passed it to his corporal, and took his place in the rear of the procession.

By this time the heat had begun to tell heavily upon the players : their bodies were dripping, their breath came short, their hearts beat fiercely, pumping the blood into their heated brains. The soldiers cursed a little as they ran, and the students, dropping all forms of empty politeness, snarled at their enemies like very laity. They fell upon Corporal David, clawing him savagely to get the better hold of his shiny skin, tore the ball from his grasp, and struck sharply with their elbows at all who opposed them. Then Enoch, collared by the half-back, passed the ball to a student in front of him, who, ignoring the cry of " Off-side," forced his way almost to the goal, and hoisted the ball over the cross-bar with the side of his foot, and Man-o'-War never stirred a finger to stay him. In the flush of victory the Bishop behaved like a child, and shrieked with derisive laughter when the Army appealed to the umpire against a goal brazenly got by an off-side. But the umpire conceded the goal without hesitation, and the soldiers turned their

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recriminations on Man-o'-War, who might easily have saved it if he would.

After the kick-off Enoch headed for the goal, and the fortunes of the home team began to droop. Still Man-o'-War brooded over his wrongs, and gibed at the umpire. If Enoch had left him unmolested the Church might have tasted victory. But Enoch was no general, and his Bishop was far away. Man-o'-War stood right in his path : he halted three paces in front of him, and aimed a mighty kick at the goal. The ball splashed right in the giant's face, and drew his fury into a more natural and a more seemly channel. At his shout of rage the forces of the Church trembled, as better men than they did at a shout from Scamander's banks. Smarting with pain, Man-o'-War caught the ball, threw Enoch headlong, ran easily along the boundary until he had the players behind him, and then bore down upon Michael with terrific speed. The chaplain, half recovered from his last misfortune, never flinched. He only cast his eye to heaven, and cried for help in his hour of need, and then presented his battered person to his new assailant. But Man-o'-War was not pitiless. Michael was his old comrade, and he slanted from his course to avoid him. High over the cross-bar flew the ball, and the goal was won. That blow in the face cost the Church five goals before half-time ;

and if there had been no greater catastrophe, Man-o'-War might have gone on outpacing his opponents till the end of the match.

The army of the Church, now thoroughly demoralized, was straggling over the field, breathless, dragged with sweat, and very sore at heart. There was something exasperating in their helplessness, for what is to stop a man who can run twice as fast as any other human being? They were a match for the soldiers by themselves, but the soldiers scarce ever touched the ball. The Bishop, whose geniality had been withering with every goal, wore a hunted look. The students began to harry the soldiers who trailed behind the flying form of Man-o'-War. They ran snapping at their heels, and jostled them intentionally, though the ball was far away. Such conduct, from students trained to humility and deference, could not long be borne, and the end was very near. Man-o'-War, short of wind at last, stayed near his own goal to recoup, for neither side showed fine discrimination about places in the field: forwards changing freely with full-backs when the humour took them, while the captains viewed all lapses from discipline with an indulgent eye. David had the ball now, and was threading his way cleverly through the straggling ranks of the enemy, when he encountered Enoch. He dodged his outstretched

arms, and would have used an open lane to the goal, when Enoch caught him by the waistband with one hand, and grabbed his tangled red locks with the other. David's agony and the open defiance of the two most stringent rules warranted a warm protest to the umpire ; but such an affront from a student of divinity did not suggest to David the formality of judicial procedure. He simply dropped the ball, and hit Enoch in the eye ; he also called him roast cannibal meat, with certain other things in English that I forbear to record, and aspersed his female ancestors for three generations. The row began at once. Now, a scrummage in a football field, while the ball lies neglected apart, calls for the intervention of the umpire, but in the storm of furious recrimination the umpire was unheard. He was shouting to David to let go Enoch's hair, and proceeding to enforce his authority by laying hands upon him, when Man-o'-War, who of all things in this world most dearly loved a row, bore down upon them. (But for a little affair on the Nandi coast, in which the heads of sundry of her Majesty's loyal native subjects were cracked, his rank and abilities would have entitled him to higher office than canteen keeper.) Here was a row ready to his hand, and not of his making. With a joy of battle in his eyes he swept down upon the scrummage. He did not worry

himself about the judicial aspect of the case ; he stayed not to hear the measure of responsibility nicely awarded ; he only saw the umpire laying violent hands upon one of his own side, and he went for him. In the tossing sea of arms and heads the umpire foundered, and met his fate somewhere deep below the surface under the trampling feet. And Man-o'-War had an inoffensive student by the shoulders, and was whirling him like a flail about the ears of the others, who would have broken and fled, had they not been entangled among the limbs of their fallen brethren.

And now the Bishop, who, delighting in his new-found skill, had been placidly dribbling the ball towards the enemy's goal unopposed, turned to look for his supports. He took in the situation at a glance, and, leaving the ball to the solitude of neglect, ran bleating down towards the battle. "Ae! Ae! Boys, what is this? What? A fight about a game of football? For shame, Man-o'-War! For shame, David! Remember who we are. Here you," he cried to his young men, "come out of it. Away to the river out of sight, and let me speak to them alone. Away—ah-h-h." His sentence was ended in a hoarse rattle in the throat. A sacrilegious hand had taken him by the beard and wrenched his jaws together. But before all things the good Bishop was a man, and a martial



"MAN-O'-WAR WAS WHIRLING HIM LIKE A FLAIL."

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spirit was hidden deep beneath the starched bosom of his shirt. There are some wrongs that it is not right to take meekly ; there are times when slowness to anger is more reprehensible than a spirit of self-seeking. The Bishop dashed into the thickest of the fray with eyes aflame. Aghast for the moment at the sacrilege perpetrated by Man-o'-War, the soldiers paused, but the students, rallying to the defence of their pastor, left them no time for repentance. The struggle surged about the Bishop ; there was the scratchy rip of calico ; a hand or two waved fragments of the official shirt ; and lo ! the Bishop fought on naked to the waist. And now Michael, bound by ties to both of the combatants, waddled to the rescue, and assumed the peacemaker. He tried to reason gently with Man-o'-War, who was past listening to reason ; he poured a stream of soothing phrases upon the troublous sea of heads. And then a relentless eddy sucked him too into the vortex, the weight of the crush constricted his girth, and in wide-eyed terror he went down, like the umpire before him, to form a yielding cushion for the feet below.

And now the fury ran higher than mere trampling could sate. There was a cry for weapons, and a man or two broke from among the soldiers and ran back. The spectators, stricken mute with

horror until now, began to close in, and none knew with whom they would cast their lot. The students saw the rush for weapons, and fell back. A few ran to a pile of stones outside the boundary. The scrummage was breaking, and we were to see the havoc it had wrought. At last a half-naked figure burst from it, wild, torn, and inarticulate with fury. Who could recognize in so awful a symbol of anarchy the wise Bishop of the Mountains, the patron of field sports and innocent competition? He was yelling hoarse commands to his followers, and one ran up and put a ragged staff into his hand. It was the first weapon used in the battle, and behind it rallied the Church team undismayed. It was now known to whom the spectators gave their sympathy. Above the shrill screams of the women, the voices of the men had begun to take up an ominous war-chant which the soldiers knew too well. The country-side had declared for the Church, and the Army knew its danger. In another moment it would be cut off from camp, for a body armed with sticks and stones was closing on its rear. The soldiers wavered, and the Bishop saw their hesitation. He charged, using his ragged staff with terrible effect; and then—I blush to say—a sound profaned his lips which was unmistakable, though it has been officially denied. It was his tribal war-cry, and

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the students of divinity took it up as if they were all man-eating heathen together. The rout was complete. There was barely time to jam-to the gates as the last of the soldiers sought asylum, ere the Bishop, his forces gathering at his heels, was battering upon them.

Safe within entrenchments, the garrison had a sudden access of courage and clamoured for retaliation, but when the men had been got into one of the barrack rooms out of sight, the composure of the sentry doing his beat unconcernedly on the wall had time to work upon the rabble, and it began to melt away. Not until the moon was up did I go forth to view the field of battle. The ground lay white in a ghostly silence, showing no sign of the conflict which had disfigured it, except the football, lying unnoted where the Bishop had left it, and one other object near the farther goal. This moved as I drew near, and I saw that it was a man, sitting hunched together, his head between his hands, and crying like a child. He lifted a scared face to me, and, with a spasm of compassion, I recognized the Bishop, a very pitiable spectacle, with his beard torn and his body dreadful with dust and blood. I tried to comfort him, but his wound lay too deep for cheering words to reach.

“After all, it was only a game,” I said.

“A game you call it!” he moaned. “It is a devil’s game, and I am shamed before the whole world. Ah, sir, knowing us as you do, you should have kept from us this fiendish sport of kickball. The story of the battle to-day will reach the furthest corner of Viti.”

I assured him that, if he had departed from conventional episcopal bearing, he had at least won the respect of every man in camp, and laid the foundation of an influence over the soldiers which his predecessors in the see had striven for in vain. And leading him gently to the chaplain’s house I left him there, in better heart; since he realized that the vanquished were as eager as their victors to bury all memory of that devil’s game of kickball.

IV

LADY ASENATH INTERFERES

MEN'S tongues had scarce ceased from wagging over the "Devil's Game" when a disquieting rumour swept through the mountain villages. This was nothing new. Neither telegraphs nor newspapers will ever be popular where the monotony of life is daily relieved by a system of intelligence as rapid as the one and not a shade more accurate than the other; where, moreover, there is no vulgar monopoly by a class, but every man is his own journalist, and is free to devote to the expansion of his messages whatever poetic imagination Nature had bestowed upon him. But this rumour was so rich and bold in detail, that we felt that it must either have passed through the transmitting instruments of more than one highly-gifted telegraphist, or contain a substratum of truth—an alternative too strange to be easily accepted. It was finally traced to "The Snake" (village police-

man), who had come to the canteen store to buy a yard of furniture lace for the trimming of his wife's Sunday pinafore, and he, being put to the question, declared that he had had the report from the mouth of all the world, and had delivered it to the canteen storekeeper virgin and intact for him.

Rumour ran that in the mountains had appeared a prophet, who bestowed the gift of immortality upon his fellows, and communed with the gods of old. He taught that the day was at hand when the great Dead would return to earth, and possess the land with their descendants, expelling the foreigners for ever. He went forth through the villages, crying—"Leave all, and follow me." And seeing how he made the aged young, and the sick whole, many followed him. And now for a time he had withdrawn into a mountain glen, to teach his followers the sacred dances against the day when his prophecy should be fulfilled. They were strange dances, these, for they recalled rather the evolutions of soldiers than the ceremonious *meke*, inasmuch as the dancers moved to words of command, and each man carried a gun. "And this, sir," concluded the newsmonger, with a nice appreciation of the chief foible of postmen, "is no mail-carrier's tale from across the mountains, but a true report brought to me by the policeman's wife's cousin from Walá. Many other things he told me

of the new teacher, but the rest I have forgotten in the haste of my journey."

Hard upon his heels came a dusky clergyman, whisking the beads of haste from his brow with his thumb. He was the forerunner of the Bishop himself, whose visits to the camp had been confined to strictly professional business since the tempestuous football match. And this too, he panted, for the ascent to the main gate was steep, was a business visit of the most vital importance to the Church, nay, to Christianity itself.

There was a stir without ; a familiar voice cried, "Wait for me here, boys ;" the gravel ground under bare soles ; broad shoulders blocked the square of sunlight in the doorway ; and Bishop Wesele grasped my hand. His jolly face looked older ; the lips, set firm under the black beard, scarce relaxed in answer to my smile of welcome ; brooding anxiety furrowed his brow and dimmed the brightness of his single eye. And yet, the spirit of the man was such that he still strove to take the news lightly. Yes, it was true. Satan had tempted the mountain tribes, and they had fallen. Heathen rites were openly practised ; kava had been offered at the tombs of the ancestors ; and one Dungumoi deceived the people with his lying tongue.

In his youth, said the Bishop, this deceiver had fomented sedition, and had been justly deported

by the Government to one of the eastern islands. But so inoffensive had he seemed to them charged with his custody, that he had lately been allowed to return to his mountain village. His own version of the affair was far more picturesque. The Government, he said, knew everything. It knew his power, and feared him, and had seized upon his body, and shipped it to Tonga in a steamer. But he laughed at so clumsy a contrivance, and left the Government his wraith to maltreat in Tonga, while his body swam swiftly back to his native valley. For he was the humble instrument of a high mission, the chosen confidant of the gods, the Dispenser-Elect of the gift of immortality. He had not come—and here, the Bishop said, was shown the rascal's cunning—to oppose the teaching of the foreign missionaries, but rather to fulfil them. They were poor, ignorant, well-meaning foreigners, who did their best according to their lights. But their mission was to play the Baptist to his Messiah; and when they preached of Jehovah and Jesu, their words were true; only, being blind, ignorant foreigners, they knew not the true names of those divinities.

Long ago, in the misty past, the ancestor-god, Dengei, had waged war against his sons—Nathirikaumoli and Nakausambaria—and had driven them out of their stronghold in punishment of the death

of the pigeon, whose voice was wont to awaken him at sunrise. From the roots of the god-tree poured a flood that inundated the world, and swept the two young gods away to seaward, whence they never returned. To him had been vouchsafed the revelation of their adventures. Their canoe had stranded upon the shores of the foreigners, who fell trembling before them, and named them Jehovah and Jesu, it being the unvarying custom of foreigners to distort Fijian names. It was known of old that they would one day return from the west with a canoe full of ancestral spirits bringing the millennium, when the dead chiefs would return to earth to possess the land with their living descendants, and the foreigners would flee away in terror, leaving whole stores full of calico and tinned salmon to them that had faith. In the meantime he, the chosen evangelist, had been sent before to elect from an unworthy generation a few mortals fit to associate with the deathless gods. Those he would give to drink of the water of life from a square bottle of the precious fluid that had been entrusted to him, and they would regain the elasticity of perennial youth. But the native missionary teachers, together with all them to whom faith had not been granted, would, like the Government, wither away in the strong presence of the Immortals.

"You will mark, sir," concluded the politic Bishop, "that in this lies a grave peril for you foreign gentlemen. When this lying teacher cannot fulfil his prophecies, and the storekeepers do not abandon their possessions as he has foretold, he will bid his followers bring about a fulfilment with the club. And note his cunning. What do we Fijians most ardently covet? Is it not land and the possessions of foreigners? What do we most fear and reverence? Is it not our ancestors? He promises the one as an inducement, and uses the other as a threat against those who will not drink his devil's potion, his *wai-ni-tuka*. And, lest the missionaries should prevail against him, he pretends to take part with them."

Supposing the story to be true (and the Bishop's information was generally correct), the news was serious. For ten years the mountains had been at peace; every Sunday, when the drum beat for service, the most hardened ex-cannibals had filed in procession to the chapel, until church-going and family prayers had become a dreary habit. The teachers had waged successful war against tattooing and a dozen customs they called heathen. The Government had so sternly repressed witchcraft that its practice was believed to be forgotten. The result had been to make native life intolerably dull. The spirit of the young men must long

have secretly revolted at the dreary planes of virtue before them, unbroken by any vice. The histrionic instincts of the hereditary priesthood, once vented in demoniac possession by one of a multitude of evil spirits, was now cribbed within the limits of a church revival-meeting; the warriors' blood-lust was compelled to feed on the occasional sacrifice of a lean and leggy hen for the breakfast of a passing stranger. There were not even theological differences to quarrel about; for the Wesleyan was the only form of Christianity ever heard of. In truth, it was time there was a new religion; and a native prophet with a home-made creed was badly wanted.

I tried to reassure the Bishop, by urging that the Government, that sleepless creation of the foreigner, assuredly knew all, and had already taken measures to crush the green shoots of this promising experiment in religion-founding or ever they pushed through the mountain soil. But he wanted no help from me. "To you, sir," he retorted, "all this is nothing, for you know the strength and wisdom of the Government. But what will it profit me who have these souls to save, if the lying teacher and his followers labour a twelvemonth in the prison-house? My people will say that his teaching was true, but that the Government had such fear of him that they took

him away. Then reports will be brought from the prison that he is working miracles, at which the jaws of the fat-head warder himself would fall agape. The man must be shown before my people stripped of his lies."

"But, O Wesele, who will strip him?"

The Bishop stroked his black beard, and wagged his great toe thoughtfully. Then he looked up at the thatched roof, the fire of purpose began to glow in his one eye, his features were unflatteringly transfigured with emotion. I saw that he had had a call of some kind, and was not surprised when he said simply—"I, sir, will do it." If argument had ever prevailed against lofty conviction, I should have urged that the seat of the heresy lay beyond the limits of his diocese; that not improbably he would get into trouble with his missionary if he left his post without authority, and that the exhortation of a minister, however well chosen, would under the circumstances produce more irritation than penitence. But seeing his enthusiasm, I kept my own counsel.

"I shall not provoke the man by open defiance," he went on confidently; "that might bring my cause to nought. I shall be prudent, and fight with the weapons Heaven puts into my hands. It may even be that I shall have to fight guile with guile, and seem for a time to

be one with this liar, the better to smite him from within."

I believe that the Bishop set out across the ranges from my very door; for though he passed within sight of his house, he never turned aside to take counsel of his wife. (This caused me little surprise, knowing as I did the high-minded austerity with which the lady ruled the episcopal household.)

The rumours of the next few days brought little that was unexpected. The Prophet had assumed the native title of the Chief-Justice, and styled himself *Na-vosa-vakandua*—He-Who-Speaks-But-Once. He had a thousand men, armed and drilled, hidden by fifties in the bush. The Government was arming; was sending eight men-of-war to bombard Nakauvandra; was demoralized; was fleeing for its life; had captured the Prophet, and loaded him with chains; was praying at his knees for forgiveness. Having experience in the compression of such messages, I judged that the Prophet was still at large, and that the Government was giving him rope enough to hang himself ere it did him the honours of arrest. But upon the fifth day there came a report that set our quiet valley a-hum with excitement. It was whispered that the rank and intellect of distant provinces were flocking to the Prophet, who had passed down to the river, and was holding a holy

dance of adherents. The leader of this dance—nay, the very lieutenant of the Prophet himself (and here the narrator's voice sank to an awed whisper), naked, painted for war, and brandishing a rusty Tower musket, was—dare I profane the name?—Wesele, Bishop of the Mountains! This was the price, whispered rumour, that he had paid for the miraculous restoration of his lost eye, which now gleamed through the war-paint as fiercely as the other, or ever he had drunk from the sacred square-face. The valley simmered with agitation. So awful a scandal had never shocked propriety since the men of Vatusila baked and ate a policeman in order to announce their independence of the Government. The men forgot to send their wives to the field, and sat out the forenoon murmuring in the great *bure*. In the roads the inferior clergy wandered aimlessly from village to village in attitudes as limp as their white shirt-fronts, and the divinity students chattered noisily in the class-room lower down the hill; for Michael, their obese preceptor, lay on his mat stricken nerveless by the blow.

For several days strangers had been flocking through the passes from the coast, until there was not lying-room at night even on the floor of the church. Bearers of letters found excuse to loiter; policemen carrying warrants in cleft reeds had

dared to carry them no further ; prying travellers, claiming cousinship with one or other in our community, had remained to gratify their curiosity, for our little camp was the focus of the rumour-telegraph system from all parts of the mountains. The last to arrive was the Lady Asenath with her train of damsels, carrying baskets of cray-fish for the refreshment of the garrison. Her visit had been long postponed by family affairs of an entirely intimate nature, and it was only now undertaken out of compassion for the sister of Chaplain Michael, who would otherwise have been obliged to cross the mountain passes without a competent chaperon. She called upon me early on the morning after her arrival, and plunged into business without even retailing the scandal of the coast. "You have heard the news?" I began, like the interviewer of a halfpenny paper. "What do you think of it?"

She nodded knowingly, clicking gently with her tongue, and said—" *Veka !* Poor Wesele ! A true minister, but a fool. I know him."

"The report has travelled far," I ventured.

" *Sombo !* I should think it had ! Even now the missionaries are debating whether they shall not cast him out of the Church. But I—" she regarded me with a twinkle in her wicked eye

"What will you do?"

"You shall see, my friend! To-day I cross the mountains with a few of my girls, for I have business with this—this Man-Who-Speaks-But-Once. In five days I shall bring Wesele back, and Michael will be comforted."

"The man is versed in ancient lore and in the Scriptures. You may have to reason with him. Do you know your Bible, Asenath?"

"Books?" cried she contemptuously. "The books I read are men and women. They are the best books, and bound in leather like the best. If there be any pages in them unknown to me, then am I no match for this man. Books, forsooth! Give me men—young men!"

The masterly decision of this admirable woman had often evoked my homage. She made no secret of her creed—that the noblest duty of the old is to clear the path for the young—and she undertook this grave enterprise as lightly as it had been the healing of a lovers' quarrel. Towards evening we bade her God-speed at the main gate, while her three maidens bound her slender provision upon their shoulders, and she lightened the moment of parting with her pointed wit. Besides the Pussy-cat and Maraia, who never left her side, she had a pretty mountain girl to guide the party over the hills. As we shook hands, an ill-favoured mountaineer joined us from the river,

and took the girl roughly by the shoulder. At her indignant ejaculation Asenath turned, and asked the fellow what he wanted. He was, he said, the village constable of Tawaleka, and the chief had sent him to take the girl home, or at least to be her guardian on the journey—"lest she come to harm." Asenath looked him haughtily up and down for a moment, and then she said—"Go, ask the chief from me what kind of animal is a village policeman? A spirit?" Then, as the fellow departed grumbling, she cried—"And ask him also whether, if he would send meat to a neighbour, he gives it to his dog to carry?" And in the laugh that followed, Wesele's rescue party set forth upon their noble errand.

The hinder slopes of the sacred mountain, Nakauvandra, where the gods dwell, are pierced by a tiny ravine, clean cut as by a gouge. A silver thread traces the course of the rift, now spraying diamonds in the sun, now tinkling over clean gravel darkened by the shadow of fruit trees planted by a bygone generation before the foreign plagues had swept the country bare of men. No path leads travellers to this spot; scarce a human hand has parted its tangled vines since its last inhabitant was stilled, and the pigs and fowls wandered masterless into the wild bush. Yet to-day an odd-shaped roof-tree pokes up through the

foliage, its fresh-cut thatch scarce browned by the weather. The structure is of that fantastic shape which tourists know when they buy native curiosities : square, squat walls unpierced by windows and fantastically lofty in the roof,—fashioned, in short, on the model of the ancient heathen temple. Among the trees about it are scattered little temporary shelters, and a thin whirl of smoke hanging about the lower branches shows that men were here within the hour. But no living thing is visible except a speckled albino pig blinking in the sunshine of the open space before the temple. The cradle of the new faith was well chosen, for no cosier nest for the hatching of plots could have been found in all the group. The rustling of dead leaves awoke the pig to consciousness, and the Lady Asenath, led by her little mountain guide, broke in upon his reflections. She motioned her maidens to silence, and crept up the sloping log that made a ladder to the low doorway of the temple. To her eyes, blinded by the sunlight, the house seemed quite dark ; but by degrees she saw that the place was littered with bales of bark cloth, stacks of boxes and knives, such wealth as none but a storekeeper could ever hope to possess ! From a nail driven into the king-post swung a cluster of whales' teeth, any one of which would buy a human life. If all this, she thought, was the

guerdon of immortality, and could be bought for a drink of dirty water from a gin-bottle, wealth, fabulous wealth, had lain within her hand too, if only she had had the wit to think of it. And in the corner, breathing stertorously, in hoggish sleep, ex-animate with the debauchery of a night's devil-dancing, lay the man who *had* thought of it. He was a sooty-skinned, hairy little wretch of middle age, this Prophet, as mean-looking as any headman of a village council; and by sheer force of lying he had sucked the valleys dry, and lay here asleep in restful confidence that no hand would dare to rob him of his gains! Well, she, Asenath, could lie too, and she would match her wit with his!

She gave a raucous cough, and the Prophet stirred in his sleep, yawned, stretched himself luxuriously, and at last sat up, like an innocent babe awaking by his mother's hearth.

"It is I, sir," said Lady Asenath, who could be respectful when she chose.

"Who?" cried the Prophet, peering at her suspiciously. "I do not know you."

"I am Asenath, and I have come with a wretched present from Nandi to crave the water of life. I am an old woman, but the generous forces of my youth still govern me. My face is wrinkled like an ivi-nut, and my form is as you see it—unseductive. Fain would I drink of your medicine,

and see the eyes of the youths follow me as they did once, and hear again the voices that once whispered to me in the darkness, and the heart-beats of him who has tarried long for my coming."

"Are you not a Buli's wife, and obedient to the Government?"

The Lady Asenath laughed shortly.

* "Dungumoi," she said, "I *was* a Buli's wife, but Luke's enemies laid a trap for him. The district moneys in the box would not agree with the books, and he was dismissed. Truly, I have cause to love a Government who paid us two copper pence a day, and dismissed us for daring to live. Are you against the Government?" (The Prophet seemed not to hear, and Asenath edged a little nearer to him.) "Dungumoi, I have heard much of the marvels that you work. Surely you have done greater wonders than changing my body so that I find favour in men's eyes? The temper of youth I have already."

What could a prophet say to such an appeal? Dungumoi wavered. "My maidens carry—whales' teeth," added the lady. The Prophet reached behind him for a bundle rolled in many folds of dirty *masi*, and unwound a square black gin-bottle of the vulgar type. "Drink, then," he said. The lady tasted a few drops of a flat and muddy fluid, and laughed a siren's laugh. "What have

you done?" she cried faintly. "You have intoxicated me, and you—you too have grown young! Oh, you wicked man!" and she provoked him with a playful push. The Prophet blinked at her, and laid a new silk handkerchief at her feet. "Would I were a man," she said, as she accepted the gift, "that I might be one of your followers."

"It is permitted to women," said the Prophet.

"To be the first woman among your disciples would provoke evil tongues."

"You would not be the first," he urged.

Asenath chuckled inwardly.

"It would ill become me to be second to another."

"I have maidens who have drunk of the water of life, and you shall be chief among them."

"Maidens!" ejaculated Asenath, shaking with some inward struggle. "Dungumoi, I will be your chief maiden, and I will send my girls to the coast to tell the tale, and bring others among my relatives to renew the forces of their youth."

She found Maraia and the Pussy-cat dissolved in irreverent laughter. "They are Immortality Maidens," explained the Pussy-cat between her giggles, pointing to four or five clumsy mountain girls, who were busied about household affairs among the trees.

"Oho!" cried Asenath; "and what are the duties of Immortality Maidens?"

"They are Dungumoi's cup-bearers; they minister to all his wants; but having drunk of the water of life, maidens they are, and shall be whate'er befall them."

"Take heed," said Asenath, with mock gravity, "that I make you not his cup-bearers also."

"Cup-bearers, forsooth! It is well! I would rather deal with a man than a prophet," said the Pussy-cat.

The Lady Asenath called one of the Immortality Maidens to her, and finding that she made no mystery, inquired indifferently about the Bishop. For two days after his arrival, it appeared, the Bishop had been on intimate terms with the Prophet, drinking from the sacred bottle, and even taking part in the devil-dance. Then there had been a sudden quarrel, and the Bishop had been seized, and sent under escort to the house of bondage, whither one or other of the maidens daily conveyed his food. "Yet," she added, "the report is carried to the coast that Wesele still leads the dance, and many come in to us every day on this account."

The Lady Asenath laughed, and bade the girl lead her to the house of bondage. It was a hut some two hundred yards distant, very roughly and hastily run up among the thickest of the trees.

Two men lay dozing across the threshold, but they obeyed Asenath's imperious order to come out while she spoke to Wesele.

In the half-light, shirtless, dirty, unkempt, with the black war-paint still imperfectly washed from his eye-sockets, the Bishop was a pitiable object. Rusty handcuffs confined his wrists, though maltreatment and adversity had blunted all spirit of resistance. Yet at the sight of Asenath, whom he had always treated with playful toleration while deprecating her fashionable worldliness, he strove hard to recover a little of his old sprightliness. "*Veka!* The length of the road from Nandi! What news bring you from the coast, madam?"

"Strange news, Wesele. The story is that a minister of the Church consorts with the heathen and dances devil-dances blacked for war with a musket in his hand. The preachers hold their peace for shame, and the divinity students bay for news like hungry dogs."

The Bishop groaned.

"Alas! Say thou this? If the missionaries hear such reports how will they understand?"

"They have heard it, and already they speak of putting Wesele out of the Church."

"Ah, madam, pity me and tell them this. I came here to wrestle with the devil. For a time this lying teacher listened to me, appointing a day

when he and all his followers would abjure their foolish doings. And when he temporized, I seemed to consent a little to their folly, the better to lay hold of them. It is true that I danced with them, for in dancing itself I hold that there is no evil, and I hoped to turn their dance into ridicule. To this end I cast away my shirt, and girded my *sulu* about me, and let them blacken my face as if for war; but when they cried '*Keek Ma! Halu,*' and '*Steese,*' as the sergeants call to the soldiers, and taught us to cry gibberish like the green parrots, it was more than I could bear. Then they seized me, and cast me into this house of bondage. And another thing, I wetted my lips with their devil's water. This was the crowning folly."

Asenath shook her head; many things might be explained away, but that a Bishop should paint his face black and prance half-naked in a devil-dance for any motive but pure love of the thing—that was very hard to get over.

"Do they mean evil to the Government?" she asked.

"Assuredly. Every day Dungumoi brings lying promises from his gods. The white pig he fattens in yonder sty is a symbol for the foreign gentlemen. He says it is to be killed the day the gods return to earth. On that day the foreigners and the Government are to be swept away, and

their property to be shared. Even now he teaches his people to drill with muskets. Only, it is long since he served in the constabulary, and he has forgotten some of the words."

"All this must be known in Suva," said Asenath thoughtfully; "already soldiers must have started to arrest these fools, and if they find you among them it will go ill with you. Wesele, you must betray Dungumoi to the Government; so will you win great honour for your skill in negotiation."

"But how escape?"

"That will be my affair; I too have drunk of the water of life. Remark the strange brightness of my eyes, and the youthful vigour of my person. They have been restored, like the vision of your sightless eye. Such favour have I found in Dungumoi's eyes, that he has appointed me chief among his cup-bearers, Wesele. I am an immortality maiden, mark you. This you can scarce have suspected. To-morrow, Dungumoi and I will send you down the river to prepare the way for us."

The Bishop winced a little at her levity.

"I pray you, madam, do nothing wrong on my account."

The Lady Asenath laughed mischievously.

"You have heard of me, Wesele, and my doings. They have not been blameless in the eyes of the

Church, I know well; yet never danced I naked in war-paint to amuse a band of heathen. I go to make life pleasant to Dungumoi, and to-morrow we shall send you down the river."

The Lady Asenath made life very pleasant to Dungumoi, whose tastes in the hours of relaxation were low. As his Mistress of the Revels she was at pains to arrange a programme of amusement that would lift the curtain of a new world to the poor homely old hillman. With so wretched a material as the six Immortality Maidens, hastily drilled by the Pussy-cat, she lapped him in the luxury of a Venusberg. There was no devil-dancing that night, for the men were weary with their day's foraging, and the Prophet had no need of them. The order went forth that none save his chosen lieutenant should stir from his sleeping-place till the morning: for there were mysterious rites to celebrate, and the eyes of him who chanced upon them would be smitten blind. The stage was the temple, the green-room the forest glade without, the low doorway the curtain that lifted on fresh bewildering surprises. It was a ballet danced in a half-light, with a cunning point in every act, leading skilfully to an intoxicating climax. In the witchery of the moment the Prophet saw a vision of a new mission that should bind his followers to him by the senses, as the devotees of another Old Man of the Mountain

were bound to their master. A voice whispered that, if these strange mysteries were widely taught, the whole country would be his. To-morrow they must move down the river, sending a messenger to prepare the people for their coming, and the messenger must be one to whom the doors of teachers, constables, and people alike would be thrown open, namely, Wesele, lately Bishop of the Mountains. He, the temptress said, was burning with indignation against a Church that had cast him out, and would, from what she knew privately of his disposition, throw his heart and soul into any movement for bringing refined, material delights within reach of the clergy and people. The night was far spent when she herself carried the Prophet's commission to the house of bondage, and the Bishop, armed with her secret instructions, set forth in his new character of evangelist of the Worship of Beauty.

In the morning, when the Prophet began his pilgrimage down the river, another dignitary broke camp, and journeyed towards him. The Commissioner with his retinue of constabulary was the extended finger of an iron hand which moves slowly but grips exceeding firm. At mid-day, guided by the Bishop, he halted in a chief village where two rivers met, and sat down to open an inquiry upon the doings of the reformer who was unconsciously approaching him. This, Wesele had assured him,

was the time and place for the Prophet's appearance; but he knew the Lady Asenath too slightly to put confidence in such promises. The Bishop sat beside the Bench, unheeding the monotonous hum of official proceedings, and straining his ear to catch the first sound of a stir outside. He had not long to wait. The first witness was scarce sworn when the earth shook with the rhythmic thud of bare feet on the march; there was a sharp exclamation from the loiterers about the door; a man squatting at the further end of the building looked out and sprang into the open; in a flash the court was cleared, and the officials were gone; a sergeant of constabulary saluted at the door, and begged the Commissioner to come. It was a sight never seen in Fiji since the British flag was hoisted. A close phalanx of warriors, six deep, their naked bodies tricked in all the bravery of black paint and streamers, marched proudly along the village square, brandishing clubs and rusty muskets, in defiance of every social convention and every Government ordinance. At their head trotted a mean, little, sooty-skinned man, trying hard to keep dignified pace with a stately lady who bore herself erect despite advancing years. The long carved staff he carried served but to accentuate his lack of dignity, and two at least of the girls who followed were quietly japing at him. When they reached the court-house, the men tossed



"AT THEIR HEAD TROTTED A MEAN, LITTLE, SOOTY-SKINNED MAN.

LADY ASENATH INTERFERES

their weapons, and yelled with one voice—"Lilifai Poliseni Oliva Ka Virimbaita" (which is not sense in any language), and marched bravely on towards the further gate of the village. But here they met men in uniform, who treated the Prophet with scant respect, even taking him roughly by the girdle and slipping iron bracelets on his wrists. Other soldiers closed in from behind; the procession was broken up; weapons were snatched, and warriors led trembling away; and in moment, nothing was left of the new Epicureanism but a group of laughing women!

Thus was Bishop Wesele restored unsmirched to his sorrowing diocese, and Lady Asenath rewarded by a frolic after her own heart, and such applause of conscience as she cared to enjoy. Yet though Bishop Wesele had great honour as a man of profound wisdom and loyalty, the history of 1887 will be silent about the services rendered to the State by Lady Asenath. Perhaps it is as well; there is, at least, one man in banishment in the far Isle of Rotuma who often meditates sadly upon them, and relieves, for a moment, the tedium of exile with the memory of her bright reading of his mission.

V

THE GREAT INTERNATIONAL CRICKET-MATCH

I CANNOT tell what folly impelled Man-o'-War to seek Lotaimi in marriage. For some months his business as canteen storekeeper had taken him to Suva, where the young bloods of Bau are wont to congregate. They taught him many fashionable dissipations: to play euchre for stakes, to smoke a briar pipe, and to take on all the airs of a man of fashion, secretly deriding him for a country bumpkin. He boasted to them sometimes of his people's boundless hospitality, a virtue in which they were conspicuously lacking, but he had begun in his heart to despise the simplicity of his native bay, and to make plans for dazzling his family by bursting on them in the guise of an eastern dandy. He was in this mood when he met Lotaimi, a most attractive young lady from Nukualofa, the Tongan capital, who was on a long visit to her uncle, one of the Governor's heralds. To be for months the

prettiest girl on the Suva beach would try the moral fibre of the most sedate, and Lotaimi was flighty before she came. Let it suffice to say that, before Man-o'-War fell under her spell, her uncle had fixed a day for packing her off to her relations. I implored Man-o'-War to reflect before committing himself. He was of an age to settle down, and there was not in Nandi a maid who would not gladly be his wife, and till his plantation for him as required by the custom of his country. But a Tongan bride was a fine lady who wanted waiting on, and would bring down a locust horde of noble relatives to plunder him and his people, scorning him the while. The poor fellow admitted all my objections, but pleaded that his heart was in question, and that it was already settled that when Lotaimi departed for Tonga, he was to follow with gifts, and a suitable retinue to woo her in style.

I was astonished to find that Lady Asenath so far countenanced the project that she had agreed to accompany him. When I asked her to tell me her real feeling she smiled wickedly, and said—"This Tongan woman will not plague us long. She will not be happy in Nandi. In a month at most she will leave; then will come the usual divorce proceedings, and Man-o'-War will be free to take the wife I will choose for him. And

we, meanwhile, will much enjoy a sojourn in Tonga."

She did enjoy it, and so, I think, did her entertainers, who still speak with bated breath of the frolics of "that Fijian lady," though her wit had all to filter through an interpreter. A nation of pleasure-seekers, they had cultivated the social arts for centuries ; and this stranger from the benighted west could beat them at their own game. On the Tuesday night before the wedding she was sitting in the house of Fekau, the one-eyed, Lotaimi's father. The place was crowded, perhaps because there was a tobacco famine in the island, and she had a habit of punctuating her discourse with the distribution of fat twists of the finest mountain tobacco from Fiji. "What news from the old town, Lasike?" cried Fekau to the last comer. Lasike lived behind the Consulate, and did odd jobs for the English Vice-consul ; consequently he was a high authority on foreign affairs.

"The Consul sent me to fetch the mail-bag from the steamer. I saw him break the seal. There were many letters—Government letters—and the Consul frowned when he opened them. Once he said 'Gottam': that was when he opened a letter on blue paper with money figures on it. But there is news, great news! An English man-of-war is coming!" He paused to enjoy the tingle in his

spine at the effect of this disturbing news delivered with so studied an indifference.

"What is it coming for?" asked Fekau: "truly there is nothing hid from Misi Watikini. Only last Sunday he said in his sermon, 'I smell a man-of-war—a man-of-war of the Government that steals land. I smell a High Commissioner.'"

"I asked the Consul about that," said Lasike. "The High Commissioner is not coming: perhaps this ship is sent before to prepare his way."

"The men-of-war of Peritania never come here for nothing," remarked Paula sententiously, "but I like them, for I let them my horses for two dollars each a day—only Captain Koli would not pay me, for he fell off, and said it was the saddle; the good ones fall off and say nothing. But Finau there rejoices even more because of the cricket. How now, Finau? Will you challenge the officers to Kili-keti?"

"I will challenge them and beat them, as we have beaten every English man-of-war till now, and, after we have beaten them at cricket, we will beat them in the sports—at running and the tug-of-war—for what foreigner can contend with us Tongans and prevail?"

"It is true," said they all. "Let Finau send the challenge and the team be chosen. The land is small and lies low, but the people have a lofty

spirit, and though we be weak in numbers, yet in cricket we are invincible. Whom will you choose, Finau?"

"I have thought of it. I will have Tomasi and Jone Fifita to bowl, for none bowl swifter than they, and the sailors scorn to carry leg-shields. I shall keep the wicket, and Maupa will back-stop, for the balls do not hurt him when they strike him on the shins. Then Haunga will be point and catch the foreigners out, and for bats we will have Alike and Talau, and Fotu, and Tubou-lahi, and Finau Fiji (that is, if he be allowed to come out of gaol for the day of the match), and Palu——"

"But Palu is covered with leprous sores."

"The foreigners will have to bear with him because of his batting. Then we will have Abisalome, and——"

"But the foreigners will not permit more than eleven."

"True, I had forgotten. They will not, though it is great foolishness. When countries go to war, every man fit to carry arms fights for his land; when town plays town with us, each side brings all its manhood into the field. So victory is to the stronger. Besides, it is fairer, for what one side lacks in skill it may make up in the number of its forces, and on this ship there must at the least be four hundred. Why do they not all come

to the cricket—stokers, midshipmen, and all!—as with us, instead of choosing eleven champions? Is it fear or is it foolishness?”

“But foreigners do not understand good cricket,” remarked Joe, who had been made keeper of the spirit-room at the Parliament-house, because strong drink was known to disagree with him. “I have watched them playing in Sydney, poking their bats in the way of the balls as though they were setting traps for sumusumu fish, not striking out boldly as good players should. Such an one will stand a whole day dropping the ball at his feet, and though there be but eleven players on a side, a match may last for two or even three days.”

“*Seuke!* Then the laws of Sydney must permit cricket. In a land where they store their food in warehouses perhaps no evil befalls, but if we did thus in this land of Tonga, who would be left to hoe the yams and feed the children? Were it not for the protection of the law there would be continual famine in the land because of this foreign game of cricket. The cricket law has saved us.”

“Yes, but a match against a man-o'-war is a national concern, and the Prime Minister will give us leave to play on other days in the week besides Tuesdays and Thursdays as the law provides. Let Finau send the challenge.”

Old Friday the pilot carried the challenge.

Custom had come to prescribe a form for the message he had delivered to every English ship of war that had dropped anchor in the bay these twenty years past. Friday spent his life looking to windward for the tops and the smudge of smoke that so seldom came. Seeing them, he fired a toy cannon, and ran up the Tongan flag as a signal to those on shore. Then he waited until the ship was in the churn of the tide with an angry reef patch under each bow, before putting off to go on board. He gravely saluted the quartermaster, the officer of the watch, and the captain, and embraced the ship's company in a comprehensive smile. "Good-morning, sir. All lite. Me come aboard. Port a little." (This to the quartermaster at the wheel.) "Velly glad you come. Tonga man like British ship. You play cricket. All lite! Tonga man play you."

The ward-room had heard of the Tongans' prowess in cricket, and that a beating has come to be looked upon as the inevitable fate of every English ship of war. Therefore a council assembled in the ward-room, and gloom sat on every brow. "As far as I can make out," said Loder, the first lieutenant, "we must have six bluejackets unless the old pay can be persuaded to bat for us. That means that these Johnnies will give us a thrashing."

"Not a bit of it," said the doctor confidently. "If I have not gone off hopelessly, I'll string some runs together for you. What sort of bowling is it?" No one knew, but tradition told that it was deadly.

"Thank the Lord then that we got those pads," said Cameron. "I never could bat when people bowl at my legs."

"You can't bat much under any circumstances, old man," remarked a candid friend. "Anyway, the pay must play or take the consequences." Now the paymaster had, so he said, been a noted cricketer in his youth, but time and an increasing dignity in his contour had induced a disposition to rest upon his dusty laurels. No, nothing would induce him, he said, to pound up and down in the sun. There were boys enough in the ship to defend her honour. The doctor had warned him that running in the sun would mean apoplexy—not this doctor, of course, he was a duffer, but his real medical adviser. The doctor appealed to by the rest remarked contemptuously, that if the pay took a little more exercise, and a little less to eat and drink, he might hold his doom at arm's-length for a few years more.

"But if we get some one to run for you, you wretched old pay," said Macnaghten, "you can stand at the wicket and knock the balls about

while we pile up the runs. Besides, they're going to stand us a cricket dinner or something; old Friday told me so, and I'll be shot if you shall come near the place if you don't play."

"A cricket dinner, and in Tonga!" ejaculated the paymaster with infinite scorn. "How bilious you'll all be!" But he showed signs of relenting.

"Well, we have got to accept this challenge whether Hawkins bats or not. Somebody tell Friday we'll play them to-morrow."

Cooper, the Customs officer, did little to relieve their anxieties. It appeared that the college square had been chosen for the match, and that there were enough cocoa-nut palms in it to make its annual yield of copra worthy of separate mention in the revenue returns. "Wicket?" he said. "Well, there's no particular wicket. They just stick the stumps in anywhere. They don't bother their heads about the trees. The fields stand about among them, and allow for the rebound. No, there's no other ground. The Malaekula is worse, and the King won't lend his compound."

The visitors agreed that there *was* "no particular wicket." The ground was bounded by a parallelogram of thatched houses, the quarters of the college lads, and the school-house closed the end towards the road. The ground had been recently reclaimed from the bush, and certain tall palms had been left

standing for shade and ornament. A few native youths were lounging about in the shade of the houses, uncinctured, as is permitted to people when on their own premises and not expecting guests. Loder looked at his watch. "It's a quarter past eleven, and not one of these beggars has shown up. Do they always treat one like this?" Cooper thought that the King's cousin was to play, and the eleven were probably drinking kava with him.

At half-past eleven a few spectators turned up, including a policeman, before whom the band of uncinctured melted away, for, by the relentless logic of the "Minisita" of Police, promotion goes to the policeman who initiates the most prosecutions, and the fine for neglecting the cincture in a public place is one dollar. Then a youth in unbuttoned uniform raced into the square, taking no notice of the expectant Englishmen. He ducked into one of the doorways, and reappeared with a big drum, which he balanced on his head as he ran off at top speed, accompanied by a knot of roysterers leaping at the drum to bang the skin with their knuckles. Thereupon Loder's feelings broke loose: "It may be their little untutored way to keep their visitors waiting. I'm going to teach them manners. We'll give them five minutes more, and then we'll go back to the ship." Loder, it may be remarked, had no humour.

Afar off there was a sound of martial music ; it gained in volume ; little brazen gusts of sound blended with the rhythmic pulsations of the big drum. Clearer it grew, and louder, till suddenly from behind the screen of houses there burst the college band, shoeless indeed, but clad in irreproachable white uniforms. They marched across the ground, followed by a rabble of sympathizers, and halted, still playing, in the shade of an undergraduate's hut. The crowd flowed in behind them, and gazed towards the college gates. "*Koeni!*" (Lo! they come), it cried. There was a pounding of unshod hoofs, and through a cloud of dust a wild troop of ragged horsemen dashed at a canter, an irregular cavalry, armed with bats and stumps, bridleless, girthless, even saddleless. They vanished behind the huts, to re-emerge on foot, walking free, with the port of heroes going to battle with victory in their hands.

The King's cousin was a young gentleman of six feet two in his bare soles (he only wore boots on Sundays), and a little fleshy for his age and stature. Being still at college, he divided the authority over the undergraduates with the English principal, and being inexperienced in obedience, he had tacitly assumed a joint dictatorship with Finau over the team, in which he held a place in virtue rather of his rank than of his skill. "Late?—no," he said to

Cooper, who interpreted. "The chiefs of the man-of-war are before their time. Finau is our captain, but I will toss." He won the toss, and put the visitors in because the sun was hot, the captain respectfully confirming his decision. Then he posted the men, going point himself and leaving Finau and Josiah to bowl. It was then observed that there were thirteen men in the field. "It is true," said his Highness airily. "Why have so many come, and where is Palu?"

"We thought that the foreigners would fain not play with Palu, being afflicted."

"*Seuke!* Shall we suffer defeat for such a cause? Foreigners have a liking for the afflicted. The doctor of the last ship even sought out Palu above all others. Call him hither, and let Enele, and Niua, and Haunga take themselves off. Eh, Finau?"

Loder and Macnaghten went to the wicket. Carter, the chief engineer, was presented to his fellow-umpire, Joe, the hater of strong liquors. The creases were marked and the wickets pitched. The fields played catch with a green cocoa-nut. "Why don't we begin?" asked Loder. "One man not come," explained Joe, whom five years before the mast in a whaler had made an accomplished linguist. "Besides, no dam ball. Boy run fetch 'im." Loder muttered things that indicated a

ruffled temper, and would have offended further had not a ball at this moment shot from the crowd and rolled across the pitch.

“Where is this fellow Palu?” *Koeni!* The crowd parted, and a man walked hesitatingly to the wicket. He was like the others in dress and build, but with a difference. Palu had no face. Lupus—more horrible though less deadly than leprosy—had fretted his features till they had melted into one seared plane. And yet, with every trait of humanity blotted and sponged from his visage, with the machinery of his organs exposed naked and unshrinking to the sun, his body stood erect and strong, a man among them all. The Englishmen looked once at him and gasped, and one of the bluejackets, staring fascinated with loosened jaw, ejaculated, “My gawd, is ’e going to play?”

“Palu, come and bowl.”

“Pelay!” cried the afflicted, and delivered his first ball. There was no doubt about his bowling: it was fast, clean, and well-pitched, but the ground treated it villainously. The little hillocks and depressions, ringing hard like metal, caught the ball, and played tricks with it, impossible for any batsman to foresee. After the third delivery Loder resolved to make his own head his chief object of defence. The balls all rose six feet

at least, and the wicket could take care of itself. Finau took the next over, and the entire field was concentrated in the slips and behind the wicket. Finau's bowling was terrific, and, pitching on smoother ground, the balls were not so erratic. In one respect the Tongans' fielding was beautiful. They ran like hares and threw from any distance without making a mistake, but their bungling in picking up was generally a compensation. Macnaghten began to gain confidence, and punished Finau's bowling in a way that surprised him. He was scoring heavily too off Palu, the faceless, and there was palpable agitation in the councils of the home team, until there came a check. One of Palu's balls struck Macnaghten on the shoulder, and dropped into the hands of the wicket-keeper, who immediately appealed to the umpire. "*Mate!*" pronounced Joe with decision. Macnaghten, still rubbing the injured spot, prepared to receive the next ball.

"You're dead!" said the King's cousin.

"Who says so?"

"The umpire." And his Highness indicated the hater of strong drinks.

"Oh, bosh!" said Macnaghten, "he don't know the rules." Palu chucked the ball to point, who sent a catch to square-leg, who sent a catch to mid-wicket, and the game flagged.

"Hit your shoulder, didn't it?" cried Loder.

"Yes, I can show the umpire Johnny the mark if he likes. He don't know the rules."

"Here, Cooper!" shouted Loder. "Come and explain to these fellows that a man can't be caught off his shoulder."

But the King's cousin was unmoved. He said pointedly—"In Tonga we never dispute the umpire;" and continued to send up catches to the fields. Joe was unable to review his decision. Even if the ball did hit the foreigner's shoulder, still he was out for several reasons. So Macnaghten had to go, and the steam of curses that set the air simmering over the group of liberty men threatened to estrange the relations of the spectators.

The visitors insisted upon a change of umpires, and Joe took his enforced retirement into private life with resignation. He wanted to smoke, and the lust for tobacco had grown so strong within him during the last few overs that it had ended by warping his better judgment. Carter followed, and was caught. The paymaster, in whom the hopes of the visitors were centred, took his place. He said he would do his own running for a bit, and then, when he was blown, Carter should run for him. He batted steadily, and soon got on even terms with Palu's bowling. The score began

to mount. The King's cousin told the captain that a change was wanted, and took the ball himself. His delivery was peculiar. He rushed at the wicket as if impelled by a vast reserve of pent-up energy, but checked himself suddenly as if he had changed his mind, and bowled slows, like a Nasmyth hammer set to crack egg-shells. His slows were quite innocent, and they met their fate. The paymaster was in form, and punished them cruelly. He drove the fourth ball forward, straight at the bowler, an easy catch for a tall man. It took his Highness unawares on the left side of the head, with a hard, wooden ring, heard all over the field.

"Oh, I'm awfully sorry! Cooper, tell him how sorry I am."

His Highness looked surprised, and stooped for the ball, rubbing his head hard the while. "Pelay," was all he said, and he went on with the bowling.

"Jim," remarked a wag among the bluejackets, "let me 'ave a shy like that at your 'ead, and see 'ow you'll feel."

"Gawd," ejaculated the awe-struck Jim. But retribution was at hand. Whether an order was signalled to the field at large to bring down the paymaster in his stride, or it was the purest accident, I am not concerned to discuss; but certain it is, that while he was running out a close

three a ball came in hard from long-leg, and buried itself beneath his midriff with a soft thud. He fell without even a groan.

"The fat one is dead," cried the Tongans, crowding in; yet it was his wind and not his life that had been taken. When the poor paymaster struggled to his legs at last it was seen that his batting was over, and after a feeble attempt to stand up again to the bowling, he resigned, and his place was taken by the doctor.

"With bowling like this," the doctor had observed to the petty officer scoring, "there is only one way to play. Don't be over-cautious; hit freely and run up the score." His first ball came from Finau. He made a terrific swipe at it, and it took his off stump. He tried to shame down the laughter by a brave effort at dignity as he walked to the scoring hut, where the petty officer was saying audibly to a bluejacket, "You will observe, Smith, that there is only one way to play—hit freely, and run up the score."

The visitors had now come to their tail of blue-jackets, who went to the wicket without either shoes or pads. When they were hit, on the shins or elsewhere, they did not seem to mind, and this delighted the Tongans so much that the bowling became wilder than ever. Their lives were short, but merry. They ran out and swiped blindly at

everything ; the balls clashed among the cocoa-nut stems, and the Tongans chased them from tree to tree in fits of laughter ; but the end soon came, when Loder carried his bat for thirty-three out of a total of seventy-one.

Loder lost no time in getting his men into the field. He gave the ball to Matthews, the blue-jacket, and took the other end himself. Philemon, the new umpire, a college tutor of erudition, and the Radical member for the town, was not inclined to admit any superior knowledge in the foreigners at their own game, and gave everything impartially "not out." Finau and Palu, the afflicted, were the batsmen. Matthews bowled two wides and then spoke out to the umpire. "Look 'ere," he said ; "you tell that feller to keep to leeward of me when I'm bowling. See ? He makes me bowl wides, that's what he does." And he illustrated the accusation by pinching his nostrils.

Thereafter things went more smoothly ; the bowling was straight, and the batting less incautious. The fielding was a trial, until the visitors had learned to allow for the rebounds off cocoa-nut trees. The balls shot off at the least expected angles, and where a Tongan would wait till they had chosen their final resting-place, an Englishman dashed off leather-hunting in the wrong direction.

And now Palu, the afflicted, began to hit out freely. His muscles, clothed so loathsomely, at any rate were sound; he had felt his way with the bowling, and he now stepped out and made a splendid hit that almost cleared the trees. But not quite. Long-on ran to meet it as it fell, but it did not fall. Other fields joined him, feverishly trampling the dead cocoa-nut leaves in vain search. Meanwhile the Tongans were running. Loder had seen what had become of the ball, and shouted "lost ball," but the batsmen took no notice. They had already run seven, when the Tongan umpire explained in dumb show that they would go on running until the ball was found; that it was lodged among the leaves on the crown of one of the great palm-trees. He made gestures as of a monkey swarming up a pole, and a bluejacket, grasping the situation, planted his bare feet against the wrinkled shaft, and climbed up hand over hand as he had seen the natives do. At last he reached the lowest frond, and hoisted himself among the great leaves, fumbling for the ball. Wedged fast in the trough of a leaf-stem he found it, and pitched it from his lofty seat at a venture. It chanced that Finau and Palu were running their nineteenth run, and the ball, falling near the crease, rolled idly against the stumps and toppled off a bail. There was no doubt about it—Palu, the



"THE BALL WAS LODGED AMONG THE LEAVES OF ONE OF THE
PALM TREES."

afflicted, was run out for twenty-seven, and the laugh was turned against the Tongans.

With the fall of the afflicted the damp pall that had shrouded the spirits of the visitors was suddenly lifted. Philemon, the umpire, indeed, made a show of resigning his post to his disfigured countryman, actuated either by calculating generalship, or by pure weariness of office ; but Loder no sooner learned from Cooper the negotiations that were afoot, than he interposed emphatically, and obliged Philemon to leave Palu in retirement. He had afterwards cause to regret his interference.

The bowling now began to prosper. The lives of the batsmen were short, if merry : they wasted no time in defending their wickets ; they were there to get runs, and they knew but one way of getting them, which was to step boldly out of their ground and swipe at everything. By threes and fours the score mounted rapidly, but at intervals there came a ball that surprised batsmen and bowler alike. Glancing from one of the hillocks that studded the pitch, it shot past the whizzing bat straight into the hands of Black, the wicket-keeper, who had stumped his man and appealed or ever the batsman had recovered his balance from the mighty stroke with which he had smitten the air. To the mind of the Tongan stumping savours of foul play. In Tongan cricket the

wicket-keeper is an ornamental personage appointed to encourage the field by his cries, but not to risk the breakage of finger or feature by trying to stop balls too swift to be followed by mortal eye. Therefore, as the umpires doomed man after man to premature extinction, there were murmurs among the home team, quite loud enough for the patriotic Philemon to hear.

The crowd was growing rapidly, for the news had spread that the victory upon which the nation counted was insecure. Though Tongan ladies are not usually concerned with gatherings in which they may play no part, there was one brilliant corner of the field where the Lady Asenath sparkled in a setting of youthful beauties, whose well-bred mirth could not be traced to any incident in the game. But when the shouting began to recall them from their sallies, Man-o'-War, himself no mean player, was called upon for an explanation of its mysteries. When all was said, observed the Lady Asenath, it was poor sport enough for young men to go away and play by themselves while so many damsels pined to frolic with them; such fine young men too, these that ran and sweated in the sun, and when this folly was past, they must needs return to their natural allegiance.

As each wicket fell the triumphant yells of the bluejackets goaded the Tongans to break silence.

The crowd swayed in a fever of excitement. Not a ball escaped vociferous criticism. To the English "well bowled," came the answering shout "*Malo!*" whether the bat touched the ball or not. Nine wickets were down, and the Tongans had to get eight to tie and nine to win; for by consent it was to be a one-innings match.

Jone Fifita, who had survived the downfall of five of his countrymen, faced Talau, the police-court shorthand writer, whose first over it was. The doctor was delivering slows from one end, while the untiring Loder bowled steadily from the other. The fields closed in a little for Talau, and the doctor paused a minute to settle their exact position. Then, in the tension of the moment, he bowled a wide, and the second engineer, who was umpire, called it. "*Koe Vale!*" (fool), exclaimed his Highness; "why did he say wide till he was asked? He will lose them the match." The bluejackets seemed to share the Prince's opinion, for they said "Fool" too—with a prefix. Then Pauliasi pulled a ball to mid-wicket, and snatched a run from the jaws of death, the doctor fumbling with the ball as it came in. There was no vice in his bowling, and Fifita knew it. He stepped out boldly, and drove one plump into the college thatch for three. The doctor bit his lips, and sent two slows to little Talau, who missed them both.

There was a gasp of relief from the field when Loder took the ball, and the doctor began to explain to Black how it happened. Fifita stopped the first two balls, and snicked the third away among the huts for two. The fourth he sent right into the hands of long-on. It was now one to tie and two to win, and the weaker brethren of the ship abandoned hope, but Loder set his teeth, and delivered the last ball of his over. Fifita strode out confidently, as was his wont, whirled his bat, and—missed. Like lightning Black whisked off his bails and appealed, and a great yell of triumph went up from the field. Fifita stepped back jauntily into his ground, and calmly prepared for the next ball. Umpire Philemon never winked an eyelid. It was his hour of trial, but there was no outward sign of the struggle between duty and patriotism, truth and falsehood, that should have been raging within. Perhaps—who knows?—there was no struggle, and he plunged into this iniquity of forethought and intent. Truly patriotism is a survival of savagery! This Philemon was a self-respecting and God-fearing Tongan, cultured as befits a moulder of youth, and pious as is seemly in a supporter of a persecuted Church; yet even he, tried in the fire of temptation, was found wanting.

“How’s that?” cried Loder again, in a tone of menace. Philemon paused a second on the brink

before taking his header into the flood of falsehood. 'How's that?' repeated Loder. "Not out," said Philemon faintly, taking the plunge.

"Not out? Nonsense. You must be joking," said Loder. "The man was three yards out of his ground."

Philemon began to gain confidence.

"*Moui!*" he cried, "he still lives."

"Look here," cried Loder to the field, "this coffee-coloured idiot gives the man 'not out.' It's a damned swindle of course, but what are we to do? After all he is the umpire."

There was a chorus of incredulity from the visitors, already on their way to the scoring-table. The navigating lieutenant, who had red hair and a wakeful temper, strode to Philemon, and stood over him with clenched fists. "You lying black son of a gun, what the devil do you mean by it?" he spluttered.

"Not out," said Philemon doggedly.

The stout paymaster said that he was damned. "Look here, you fellows; of course he's lying, but still he is the umpire, and we can't dispute him. Cooper, do explain the thing to the King's cousin. He must have seen the man was out from where he was sitting." His Highness was understood to say that in Tonga they never disputed the umpire.

The council of war lasted for fully five minutes.

The majority was for leaving the ground in a body, but calmer reason prevailed, and the Englishmen agreed, under protest, to continue the match, on the condition that Philemon should withdraw, which he did very readily, for he too had been long without tobacco. The very next ball sealed the fate of the match. Macnaghten, the new bowler, savage and nervous, gave Talau his opportunity, and the ball was hit for two. A yell of triumph from the Tongans rent the air, and the band, having some time before arranged the sheets on their music stands, blared out "See the Conquering Hero comes" to a deep bass of English curses. His Highness met the team on their way from the wickets as one who carries his triumph without ill-will. "Tell them," he said magnanimously to Cooper, "that they played very well, and that, of all the foreigners we have played, they have come nearest to winning."

When this was translated Loder was struck speechless. "Of all the infernal cheek," he began; when Palu, the man without a face, burst from the crowd pouring inarticulate vowels from his roofless mouth. "And tell them, Cooper," the lieutenant went on, "that I won't be set upon by this filthy leper."

But Cooper was listening to an altercation between Palu and the King's cousin, who was over-

whelming the afflicted man with injuries. "Palu says," the interpreter explained, "that Fifita was out. He saw it, and he has spoken to Philemon about cheating, and Philemon admits it."

"And what says the King's cousin?"

"Oh, he is very angry, and tells him to shut up."

"That leper is the only honest man in the country," said Loder; "tell him I should like to shake hands with him."

Thus it was that the great International Cricket Match was indecisive, and that, as with many another great struggle, the historians of both nations will claim the victory. Other English elevens may go and court defeat at the hands of the Invincibles, but, if they do, they will not find Palu, the traitor, among the adversaries, for Palu will never more be allowed to represent his country.

VI¹

KAIKAI

I TRUST that I am not conveying a false impression of the estimable Man-o'-War, when I say that he had an irresistible attraction for blackguards. A young chief, of course, must always have a few of these to his hand—what Court would be complete without them?—but the distinction of Man-o'-War lay in the fact, that of the numerous retinue that ministered to him all were blackguards, none of your skulking, sneaking, thieving scoundrels, but fine open daring rascals who faced the world, confessed and unashamed, with a streak of redeeming humour in them. Comparatively blameless himself (except in matters with which the law was not concerned), he was no sooner descended from his canteen in the mountains to his native plains than he became the lodestone for all the masterless

¹ Thanks are due to the Editor of the *Cornhill Magazine* for permission to republish this chapter.

villains of the country-side. He had but to set foot upon the track to Koromba pass and they fell away each to his own home. He was an electro-magnet, and the pure mountain air the contact-breaker.

Now, whereas the shades of villainy in the outer world merge in insensible gradations, there are three well-marked degrees in native blackguardism,—the hereditary, to whom the descendants of heathen priests belong; the sanctimonious, for which the mission is responsible; and, the most irreclaimable of all, the “White Man’s Fijian,” which includes all soldiers and sailors and most policemen. To the first and third of these classes belonged Man-o’-War’s satellites,—the second not flourishing in the breezy air of Lady Asenath’s society,—and pre-eminent in the first was Kaikai, “The Strong.”

I met him first under circumstances unfortunate for him some three weeks after his patron’s return from Tonga. The dismemberment of the new-made home had now set in, to the grim satisfaction of Lady Asenath, and household cares sat too heavily upon the master for the men to find distraction for him; like wolves without a pack-leader they scattered over the plain, only to be re-united on the next sessions day under the sheltering roof of the provincial gaol. I remember the day well. One

after another they came to judgment with a partner in guilt, for all the world as if there were a tale of weddings to be solemnized, and in every case but one the charge was the same unvarying story of contempt for the seventh commandment. The exception was Kaikai, who came before the judgment-seat alone, arraigned for stealing hens.

The case called for no complicated sifting of evidence, for Kaikai pleaded guilty to a raid upon the fowl-yard of his nearest European neighbour. He even admitted, when pressed upon the point, that he had thrice been convicted of a similar offence—that he was, in fact, a hardened stealer of hens. “He was a heathen priest, sir,” whispered the provincial scribe, “and that, perhaps, is why he is a hen-stealer !”

There was truth in this extenuating circumstance. Kaikai was not a native of the bay, but an exile from the neighbouring province. Born of poor but disreputable parents, he was the hereditary priest of the heathen temple of Singatoka. For generations his fathers had been the medium of intercourse between the people and their gods—between the living and their dead ancestors. They sat at the door of the thatched temple, and received the offering made to the god, shivering and foaming at the mouth as they declared the oracle in a squeaky falsetto. Thus they pulled the wires of the tribal

policy. The utterances of the gods by their mouths, being in singular accordance with the interests of the aristocracy, the chiefs were pious and regular in the matter of offerings. Almost daily, pigs, with their hind legs broken to prevent them from straying, were turned loose in the sacred grove, and Kaikai's fathers waxed in substance. In the course of nature Kaikai would have succeeded to the sacred office and its emoluments, for of all human institutions the priesthood in Singatoka seemed the most necessary and the most permanent. But before the old man died there had been the war. The foreigner had come, allied with the men from the eastward, all mad with blind and impious rage against the gods, and had burned the temple, and had taught the people—aye! even the elders of them—to howl empty songs after the foreign fashion to the white man's god, and to do other foolishness with money and a basin. So when this great untamable soul grew to manhood, full of the craft and subtlety of his fathers, but with his fathers' occupation gone, he naturally fell to hen-stealing whenever his patron, Man-o'-War, had no immediate use for his services.

Clearly, the prison had no terrors for Kaikai, and albeit no lover of the lash, I sentenced him as a rogue and vagabond to two months' imprisonment, with a whipping superadded. He was removed

before he recovered from his surprise, and I could see the glint of the scissors as the police sheared his head to the scalp on the doorstep of the court-house. After court he sent to implore an interview. I met him at the door of the police-quarters—a powerful, thick-set man, with a sooty tinge in the brown skin, eyes set deep and far apart, and a jaw that boded ill for obstacles. He was respectful, but he spoke as one who will not cringe to ask for his fair rights.

“I have heard, sir, that you ordered me to be beaten. It is my wish that you cancel this order. Imprisonment is nothing to me, and I fear not work, but I cannot undergo a beating. How would it be if I laboured twice as long in prison instead of being beaten?”

I pointed that the sentence of the court, once pronounced, was as immutable as the courses of the stars. He begged me to believe that the matter was open to argument.

“I will endure a year—two years even—working in the prison, but a beating I cannot endure; and I fear, sir, that unless the sentence be altered I may run away, for beating is not good for me.”

The penalties for breaking gaol were plainly set before him, and he was removed in custody.

There was no lock-up in Nandi. Some years before the station had cost the Government £30,

and the money had all been sunk in grass huts, now fallen into ruin, leaving nothing over for doors. The only building with a door within a radius of ten miles was the storehouse. That certainly had a door with a padlock ; but to incarcerate Kaikai among tinned meats and beer would be worse than shutting up a fox in a hen-roost. The prisoners of the provincial gaol hard by slept in the prison shed if they pleased, and worked out their punishment by catching fish for the ladies of the Buli's kitchen. For a prisoner determined to escape, such a place of confinement was obviously inadequate. To Suva gaol, five days' distant by land or water, must Kaikai be sent for punishment, and he had to be kept somehow until an opportunity for sending him arose. I made my native sergeant responsible for him that night, and went to bed.

In the morning he was gone. It was no time for idle recrimination. The sergeant had slept at his side ; in the morning he awoke to find himself alone, and a pair of broken handcuffs were picked up in the road. That was all. But he (the sergeant) asked only for one man and a rope, and upon his head would it be if he did not bring back his prisoner before sunset.

In the silent hour between the trade wind and the land breeze, while there was still light enough

to see a screw-pine against the grey sky, Kaikai was again before me. In his dusky features I read a calm determination that recked nothing of such trifling checks as a recapture. The sergeant and his satellite had beat the country-side until, towards evening, they found a lonely pool inviting them to bathe. There was something splashing in the water, and they crept up softly to reconnoitre. It was Kaikai, disporting his burly limbs in the bath, and blowing like a grampus. Between them and him lay his clothes, and the bone of a stolen ham that had been his mid-day meal. The pursuers captured his loin-cloth, and hid themselves to await developments. When Kaikai came out to dress there followed a scene that I shall not attempt to describe, and two clothed policemen and a naked fugitive might have been seen speeding over the hills in the sunlight. Then the sergeant, whose wind was impaired by the ease of official life, cunningly bridged the increasing interval between pursuers and pursued with his throwing-club, and Kaikai bit the dust. He bowed to the force of circumstances, and allowed himself to be bound and led back unresisting. He spent the night handcuffed to a policeman by either wrist, and in the morning he was led to judgment for breaking his confinement. He addressed the court with admirable dignity. It was

true; but there was a cause. It was the beating—a punishment to which he could never submit. Let the magistrate be fair-minded, and exchange the beating for a year's imprisonment, and he would never escape. Otherwise it might occur again. He was led away, never again to be uncoupled from his policeman till put on board a vessel bound for Suva.

For two whole days he stayed, while I strove in vain to charter a cutter to carry him to the capital. On the third he took his policeman with him to bathe. As they stood on the brink of the stream, Kaikai condoled with his guardian on the cruel necessity that forced him to enter the cold water when he might be enjoying a cigarette on the bank. It was nothing to him (Kaikai), of course, but he could not help pitying the discomfort of a gentlemanly policeman, who was bound eternally to a low-born convict like twins of a birth, when with the turn of a key he might taste relief combined with security. Truly it was hard for police to be treated like children, not to be trusted. So shrewdly did he play upon the man's vanity that the key was turned, and the end of the handcuffs transferred to the prisoner's other wrist. To the connecting chain the policeman fastened a rope, tying the free end securely to a tree. Then he went a bare five paces to pick a

banana leaf for a tobacco-wrapper, and when he came back the rope was lying in the water. Had Kaikai drowned himself? Panic-stricken, he jerked the end, and it came up empty. Kaikai had vanished. The wretched policeman rushed off in vague pursuit, imploring his absent friend to return and all would be forgiven. On a rock hard by he found the handcuffs battered and broken.

For the next ten days Kaikai was at large. I heard of him occasionally as frequenting a village at nights and spending the day somewhere in the bush, but the police could never find him, because rumours reached them that he went about with a mission axe and a blood-thirst upon him. One night a messenger came to tell me a weighty secret. Kaikai was lying in a certain house in Sambeto, and might be betrayed if a Jael could be found. My sergeant thought that a Judas would be better, and since the wanderer was asleep, himself volunteered for the part. Taking with him a friend who, he assured me, was cursed with an exuberance of personal courage that had more than once landed him in difficulties, he set off with a pair of handcuffs and a candle-end, and a short club concealed in the back of his shirt. The wary Kaikai awoke as they went in, but they soothed him with soft speeches, telling him how strongly they approved his attitude in the matter of

flogging, and reprobated the whole bench of magistrates, to which their master was the last and least promising addition. Having sworn blood-brotherhood the three turned in for the night. At daybreak Kaikai stirred, stretched himself, cleared his throat, girt his sulu about him, and moved towards the door. The sergeant and his courageous friend, who had been shamming sleep, were before him and barred the way with their bodies. Kaikai took in the situation without emotion. He simply drew his axe from the thatch, and swung it once, crying, "Out of the way, both of you!" Then he walked out, leaving the sergeant and his bold friend to gaze at one another. This, at least, this was the story told by a bystander; the sergeant's was different.

Thenceforth the fugitive threw off concealment. He even took his meals openly in the village, and thus again he fell into my hands. Before breakfast one morning a spy came breathless to whisper that he was eating in a house five miles distant. In three minutes I was trotting along with handcuffs and a tether-rope jingling from the dees of my saddle, and an active young policeman running at my stirrup. We stopped outside the village to reconnoitre, unobserved of any but the pigs, and my spy walked boldly into the house as if he had come to share the meal. In a few

minutes he came back to say that Kaikai was eating yams close to the back door, and that my best chance was to gallop boldly to the front door while he impeded escape from the rear. I moved my mare among the houses until I could see a bullet head in the vista of the two doorways, two hundred yards away ; then ramming in the spurs I scattered the pigs on the *rara* at a hand gallop. With the impetus of the rush I shot into the house, leaving the mare to crop the banana leaves outside. Our man made a dash for the back door with his mouth full of yam, but here he met my ally, and in his momentary hesitation I got my arms round his greasy neck. He grunted, spat the yam at the policeman, and fell to yelling at the top of his voice. He was strong, but I had my knees against the lintel of the door, and so he collapsed on his back on the mats, and surrendered. We apologized to our hosts for disturbing their breakfast, and formed a homeward procession followed by all the naked children in the village and half the pigs. Kaikai led the *cortège*, with his hands handcuffed behind him, and fastened to my saddle with a rope, and his anxiety about the teeth of the fierce beast that snorted so close to his shoulders evidently drove out for a time all thoughts of escape.

It was no use waiting any longer for a passing vessel. Until Kaikai could be lodged safely in

Suva gaol I should know no rest. Besides, after this last capture he was resigned almost to penitence, and he was scarcely more likely to escape when travelling along the coast under escort than when living in a grass hut on the station. He was brought up and informed that any further attempt to escape would add lashes to his punishment, to which he answered sadly, "It is true!" as who should say, "Would that I had realized it long ago!" Two policemen were picked for the escort—the one for his intelligence and the other for his muscle—and Mind was given authority over Matter. Kaikai was led out handcuffed and roped to the escort, who undertook to land him safely in Suva on the fifth day. They set out full of high hope, of confidence in themselves and each other. Twenty miles out they came to the river Singatoka, and demanded a canoe in accordance with their instructions. Every dug-out that would float was up the river for a festival, and if they waited for a canoe they must wait for two days. The swim was nothing for a Fijian—a paltry half-mile—but it was clear that Kaikai could not swim with comfort in handcuffs. Mind accordingly unlocked them, tied one end of the rope around Kaikai's neck, and gave the other to Matter to hold between his teeth. For the first hundred yards or so they swam side by side; then Kaikai began to forge ahead. As

he turned round to encourage his escort his face suddenly froze with horror, and he shouted, "A Ngio! A Ngio!" (A shark! A shark!) Neither Mind nor Matter stopped to look; they dropped the rope and swam for their lives. Kaikai did the same, and to swim the faster he undid the rope from his neck. It was then seen how terror enhanced his swimming powers, for when he waded ashore his guards were still striking out in mid-stream. He even found time to wish them a polite farewell before plunging into the bush. As he knew every inch of the country, and his escort did not, it was useless to pursue, and Mind counselled retreat to the station. That night the criers proclaimed through the villages a reward for the body of Kaikai, and the people muttered remarks disrespectful to a Government that couldn't keep a prisoner when they had got him. Feeling themselves absolved from any obligation to help the authorities, they fed Kaikai, and made life pleasant to him; and thus it might have been till now had not the "young man's fancy lightly turned to thoughts of love." The beloved object was not unappropriated, and the husband, returning from his plantation in the evening, thought that sympathy with misfortune could be perfectly genuine without embraces. Revenge, too, would be profitable as well as sweet. He took two trusty friends

into his confidence, and lay in wait in the path along which Kaikai was wont to go to his assignation. They leaped upon him, bearing him down with their united weight, and carried him bound into the village. There they divided the blood-money between them at the rate of six-and-eight-pence apiece. That night I chartered and victualled a cutter, and in the early dawn Kaikai was taken on board, and manacled to a stout ringbolt in the deck. When I had satisfied myself as to the strength of the fastenings, I pocketed the key and went on shore ; they might lose him as they pleased at Suva, but on the voyage at least he would touch the soft hearts of his guards in vain. A week later came the gaoler's receipt for the body of Kaikai, testifying to the notable fact that it was "sober" when received into custody. I slept that night in calm security, for doubtless by that time the flogging to which Kaikai had so deeply-rooted an antipathy had been impartially administered.

That was on a Tuesday. On Wednesday morning at breakfast-time my usually stolid sergeant ran in with evil tidings bursting out of every pore. "Sir," he cried, "I have just seen Kaikai dressed in the habit of a local preacher!" I was too much startled even to think of the Society for Psychical Research. Had Kaikai sent his spirit to impersonate him in order to complete my discomfiture? But the

sergeant scouted the idea of supernatural agency. It was Kaikai in the flesh that he had seen, wanting only a book of devotions to complete his clerical attire. He had cheerfully wished the sergeant good-morning, and seemed to be at peace with all the world. The sergeant's sense of the decencies had been so outraged that he had not stopped to question him; and therefore, until Kaikai could be examined, or next mail arrive from Suva, his miraculous escape must remain a mystery.

Further tidings followed hard on the heels of the sergeant. The villagers had made a feast to Kaikai, and the maidens had danced in his honour. He was friendly to all, but a little supercilious, as befits one who is on the high-road to hero-worship. Not until three bowls of yangona had loosened his tongue-strings did he vouchsafe an explanation of his re-appearance. He had enjoyed the hospitality of the Colonial Government for one night only. On the morrow he was ordered to fall in with the road gang. Even this he did, being in all respects conciliatory; but when they came to serve out pick-axes and shovels he felt that he had been humbled enough. They had told him, moreover, that a tail or two was wanting from the cat, and that he must wait a day before they plaited new ones before his cup should be full. So, in the face of the whole

gang, warders and all, he said, "Forgive me, but I am going ;" cleared the stone wall at the back of the gaol, disappeared into the forest, and stopped to listen to his pursuers. They were running straight up the hill in the thick bush—almost abreast of him indeed—and they would probably run like that until they reached the Waimanu road. In the meantime his sulu did him no credit. It was dirty, and had S. G. conspicuously branded on the breech. He must have a new outfit before starting on his travels. So he ran downhill towards the town, skirting the Polynesian settlement, dropped into the road at Nambukulou, walked briskly past two policemen, and made for the store of an Indian. The Indian had a pigtail and no calves to his legs, and was even in other respects altogether contemptible ; but there were sulus and shirts hanging in the doorway, far too good to be the property of an Indian, whether pigtailed or plain.

It chanced that this Indian was transacting a matter of business with a neighbour in mid-street—probably the neighbour owed him money—at any rate, they had collected a crowd by their gesticulations. Kaikai took down a white shirt and sulu, and reached to the counter for a black satin tie such as the local preachers use. Then he went back into the bush to dress, and the sounds of Indian lamentation in the street below were very

sweet to him. As a local preacher Kaikai scarcely recognized himself. He knew at once that he had mistaken his vocation. The stiff front seemed to tap the scources of pent-up eloquence of his heathen fathers. This, of course, was what he had been bred for until the luckless turn of the wheel made him a hen-stealer. But this was no time for vain regret. He walked boldly now to Walu Bay, passing on the way a gaol-warder running to Suva with the news of his escape. In Walu Bay there was a canoe belonging to a native minister from the other side who had gone into town to buy a bottle of kerosene for the Sabbath. There is, as Kaikai knew, a community of property among ministers of the Gospel, and Kaikai as local preacher was in far greater need of the canoe than was its owner. So he took it and paddled himself out into the harbour. As he rested on his paddle the shouts of his pursuers on the hillside sounded musically in his ears. He landed near the Namuka Island, ungratefully kicked the canoe out into the current, and started on his lonely tramp. It was almost a royal progress. At each village he told a different story, paltering, alas! with the sacred truth, but improving so artistically with each narration, that at the end he had almost come to believe them himself. The usual official notice, offering a reward for the apprehension of an escaped

prisoner, medium height, powerful frame, short hair, dark skin, tattooed with "A.A." on the right forearm, proved the truth of the first part of the story, and a lachrymose Indian and the pieces of a broken canoe gave some colour to the latter portion ; but, for the rest, it must be remembered that Kaikai was by heredity a liar. To the elders of his native village Kaikai spoke of me without animus, as of one to whom respect was due, but whose duties lay in a different sphere from his. "It no longer concerns the magistrate. It is their affair in Suva. He has done with me ; therefore, what reason have I to fear him ?"

Next morning, for the sixth time, I found myself on Kaikai's trail. The promise of a reward brought many volunteers. We surrounded the house and captured him in all his finery, without a shadow of resistance. He was surprised, of course, but not cast down. The flogging had now come to seem so far off that imprisonment had lost its terrors for him. Again he was conveyed to the capital, chained to a ring-bolt in the deck of a cutter. Again I breathed freely, taking comfort to myself that I had posted to the Superintendent of Prisons a gentle sarcasm upon the security of his arrangements. Three weeks passed away ; my duties took me back to the camp in the mountains. One evening as I went the rounds I heard the

word "Kaikai" in the babble of conversation in one of the barrack houses. Was the word an adjective or a proper name?—for in the local dialect *Kaikai* means "strong." I called out the corporal and asked him. Reluctant to betray a confidence, he admitted that Kaikai had been seen in the road below the fort that evening, in the uniform of a soldier. So he was out again. Two of the men had met him in the road and recognized him. He told them he was carrying a message to me from the magistrate on the Rewa, but when they offered to conduct him to my presence, he excused himself, giving a variety of reasons for postponing the interview. He had undergone his flogging, he said, and had even worked some weeks in the road gang; but he found the life irksome, and he left it. This time he stole a new sulu, and exchanged it with a Polynesian for an old one, vandyked about the bottom like the uniform of the armed constabulary. Then he carried off a turkey-red cummerbund, and would even have stolen a uniform belt if he had had time. As it was, he put on the largest turban he could find, and took to the bush. On the first day he reached the Rewa station, walked boldly into the magistrate's house, saluted, and stood at attention. He was under orders, he said, to carry despatches to Fort Carnarvon. His despatches? He regretted to say that he had lost

them in swimming the river. His belt? That, too, had been swept away by the flood. The *locum tenens* at Rewa, who liked not the insolent ways of the licentious soldiery, bade him begone, and the journey from the station to the camp across the mountains had taken him two days.

I was tired of Kaikai. He had become monotonous, and I pursued him no more. But two years later, when I was in Suva, a boat pulled up from Navua with the mangled but still living body of a native burglar. A store had been set on fire and broken into, and the European storekeeper roughly handled. The contents had been looted and the burglars had got safe away; but the native police tracked the culprits, and succeeded in arresting all but one. That one eluded them for several days, but at last his pursuers came upon him in the bush, and, because he would not surrender, they brought him down with throwing-clubs and battered his helpless body as he lay upon the ground. Then they carried him to the hospital to be mended.

The other four culprits were asked by the court at their trial whether they had anything to say in extenuation. "Sir," said their spokesman, "the root of the matter was Kaikai. He seduced us to do this thing. We, therefore, are innocent. It was on this wise. Kaikai came into our house in

the evening and said, 'Erone, let us have prayers.' So we had prayers. Then Kaikai said, 'How would it be to go and break open the white man's store?' And we said, 'It is well.' So we went to the store, and when we came near, Kaikai said, 'How would it be to set the store on fire, and then perhaps the white man will come out?' So we set the store on fire, and presently the white man did come out. Then Kaikai said, 'Let us trample on him.' So we trampled on him, and then we took his box of money and ran towards the river, and when we came to the river, because the box was heavy, Kaikai dropped it in"—it was afterwards found there—"and then we all went home."

"And what did you do then?" asked the court.

"Kaikai read prayers."

There was no hope for Kaikai. His arm was broken, his thigh-bone smashed in two places, and his skull fractured, and all this was four days before he reached the hospital. It was so remarkable a case of vitality that I went to see the man, not knowing who he was, and in the wretched remains of humanity, strapped and bandaged like a mummy, I saw and knew the features of Kaikai. He was wasted to skin and bone, poor fellow, and weakening every hour; but he recognized me, and I think was pleased that I, with whom the early stages of his career had been so much bound up,

should have come to see him in the last. He lived four days, and was buried in the hospital cemetery. And so, when his companions in guilt came to be sentenced, they suffered alone, for Kaikai, who had seduced them, had gone to stand before another tribunal, where, I think, hereditary tendencies and indomitable pluck must count for something.

VII

THE MAN-HUNT

IT was not to be expected that a Churchman of such enterprise as Bishop Wesele should go unscathed by calumny. What Church is free from jealousies with the keenest scent for backsliding, which crouch terrier-like on the threshold of every great reputation? The drones of the ecclesiastical hive, living in comfortable ease, never disturbed by rumours of heathen practices, affected much virtuous indignation at the means Wesele had taken to bring He-Who-Speaks-But-Once to nought, though they rejoiced in secret that he had given them so tremendous a weapon for attacking him at the next Circuit Meeting. The good Bishop knew it, but did not quail. His English superiors knew the stuff he was made of, and he counted upon an opportunity for vindicating his methods by an even more striking success. Nor had he long to wait for a triumph that has made his

name a household word from Lau to the Yasawas. To narrate this exploit intelligibly, I must be permitted to carry my reader back some twenty years.

There was war in Vuteatea of the New Hebrides—a never-ending war of reprisal. Never in the traditions of the tribe had its army fought a pitched battle ; yet, for generations, a score had been kept of the stragglers cut off on either side, and the score of Vuteatea was some four or five to the good. Outside the narrow bay all the world was enemy : every canoe that rounded the point was an enemy's canoe ; every path that ascended the ranges behind led to an enemy's country ; and the women went to their plantations under a strong escort, who stood, spear in hand, beside them while they worked. Aspiring young warriors went further afield, as far even as the enemy's plantations, and sometimes they chanced upon a woman out of earshot of her guard. If she made a noise, she was silenced and carried to the credit side of the national account ; if she went quietly, she became a hewer of wood and a drawer of water for her conquerors. The Wild Man's mother submitted without so much as a cry, and thenceforth she was a kitchen-woman in Vuteatea, without a voice in the disposal of her will or person, though in these respects, perhaps, she was

little worse off than she had been at home, where she had a husband. In fulness of time the Wild Man was born—a child without a father, without rights in the tribe, without a friend in the world, save an alien slave-mother, whose place in the village table of precedence came next below that of the village pigs.

When the Wild Man was a sooty, naked imp of five, strangers paid a visit to Vuteatea. A vast floating island furled its sails at the entrance of the bay, and a vessel of reasonable size put out from her for the beach. Vuteatea watched this craft from the cover of the trees. A man stepped ashore, and while the craft lay afloat some fathoms from the land, her crew pointing their guns towards it, he spread vast wealth on the white sand, and signified that he would buy men and women with it.

Vuteatea laughed derisively at this, until one bethought him of the prisoners of war. Three there were—two young boys now grown to manhood, and the Wild Man's mother. The young men went quietly to the vessel, knowing death was behind them if they paused; but the Wild Man's mother, with an impudence that ill became a kitchen-woman, screamed loudly, and buffeted the strangers with her hands, until a warrior, ashamed of her clamour, tapped her

smartly on the head with his club. The Wild Man, determined to follow his only friend wherever she went, was clinging to her grass petticoats when she fell, and doubtless he would have shared her servitude had not black fear taken possession of his little soul. The blow sounded so like the clean crack of a drinking cocoa-nut cleverly split with a stone, and his mother fell so loosely in her tracks, that his legs bore him shrieking away to the bush before his infant mind had even formed a wish to go. When he peered wide-eyed from his leafy shelter the vessel was far away, and he saw his mother no more.

The Wild Man was very ill after this, having gorged himself on unripe berries, and snails, and little green crabs; and when the women spied him hiding from them in the path, and marked his shrunken little limbs and his monstrously distended little body, they named him "Pot-Belly," and took him home. Thenceforth the Wild Man became the village waif, living on charity from house to house, content with the yam-parings and fish-skins that his betters would throw to the pigs, the butt and outcast of the village boys in their games. "Pot-Belly" one may bear to be called without resentment; but "No-Man's-Son" is an insult leaving scars, and as the Wild Man grew to realize the misery of being fatherless, he grew morose, and

sarled at those who taunted him—intolerable insolence in a No-Man's-Son—and longed to escape his hateful surroundings. But none knew better than he how difficult was escape. Haunting the woods until hunger drove him back to his persecutors, he knew every yard of the tribal boundary—knew where dead branches were planted upright as frontier posts, beyond which neither nation might step with impunity; knew how deserters from the enemy were received.

The Wild Man was eighteen when a labour schooner put into the bay. It was a day to be remembered in the village, for labour schooners had acquired as evil a name for kidnapping as men-of-war for burning houses and battering canoes. Both were well known by report, though thirteen years had passed since any ship had risked so poor an anchorage. When the boat grated on the sands, the Wild Man bolted up the spur behind the village with the rest. But these white men behaved not like other white men; for one of them stepped ashore clad in a flame-painted flowing robe, and performed some strange religious rite with a hat such as missionaries are said to wear, dancing reverently at intervals along the beach, and calling loudly upon his gods. One by one the bolder spirits crept from their cover; saw him leap by strange witchcraft two-endedly towards them

on hands and feet ; saw him stride slowly down to the boat upon his hands, with legs twisted monstrously about his neck ; and knew him to be loved of the gods above all other men, a very sorcerer. Then, when the Divine spirit within him was calmed, and he sat upon the sand coiling endless ribbons from an empty hat, and they had straggled down towards him with staring eyes and loosened jaw, and he had taken a hen's egg with his fingers from the whiskers of an elder, and a shining disk from the ear of the most boastful of the warriors, neither knowing that such things grew upon them, the elders asked themselves what offerings so great a sorcerer would deign to accept. Should it be a large hog ? a boar's tusk twisted beyond the circle ? or a captive slave ? But the man was so different from his fellows that he would take nothing, having rather, as he said, gifts to bestow—bright calicoes, sheath-knives, and black tobacco. Could they do nothing in return ? No. This wealth was but an earnest of what he had to give them in the land whence he came. Let but a few young men and women come with him, and sojourn a few paltry moons, and they would have their whole heart's desire : boxes of wealth, guns for the destruction of their enemies, trousers for those who stayed at home, soft meats for the toothless elders. Who could resist such a temptation ?

Not the Wild Man, nor fifteen of the village youths ; and when Vuteatea sank behind, and left them tossing on an unknown sea, and in their terror they besought the captain to return, it was too late. They and fifty others with them were "indentured immigrants," conveyed to Fiji in the *Island Queen* to work the plantations.

When the human cargo of the *Island Queen* had been tapped on the breast by a doctor, and cross-examined by an immigration clerk in a language it did not understand, and had been called by names that did not belong to it, and numbers that exceeded its numerical system, it was distributed among the planters ; some fractions of it going as plantation hands, under overseers who spoke harshly to them, and others as house-servants to masters who let them eat and idle their fill. The Wild Man fell to a Government doctor, stationed on the island of Kandavu, who made him house-servant to his wife, a lady of masterful manners, who believed that native races were created to wait upon her, and that if they failed in any of the duties of a trained domestic servant they were doing it on purpose.

She christened him "Monkey," not from any simian character in his face or form, but because the immigration office, with artistic originality, had bestowed that name upon him, spelt classically

Maqi; and the Wild Man, having himself no preference in the matter, had cheerfully accepted what was offered to him. The doctor's wife set him to wash teacups in an iron tub—there was no sink in the native house they lived in—and when he broke off the handles, shook him angrily by the shoulder. The nerves of the Wild Man were shattered by this experience, and rather than tempt fate by excursions into other domestic provinces, he kept his mat in the sleeping-house, and lay low. But not for long; his mistress knew intuitively that he was shamming, turned him out of doors, and locked the door behind him. He spent a troubled day. A loud and angry voice shook the foundations of his being, and his mistress thought that she could teach him English by shouting at him as if he were deaf.

She found at last that he could chop wood, and he was set to practise this one accomplishment, adding daily to the wood-stack, which no prodigality in the kitchen could keep from increasing. Left to himself he gained confidence, and seeing that the doctor was a good-natured soul who did not shout at his domestics like his terrible *Marama*, did many little unbidden services for him, and gradually got the run of the little hut where the gun and collecting apparatus were kept. Hither he would timidly bring beetles, and moths, and

plants picked up in the forest where he was cutting wood, and return delighted with the gift of a few leaves of tobacco from the sack in which his master kept his store.

To the Wild Man's undoing, this hut had been built on native principles. At one end was a raised bed-place, furnished with a mosquito screen, in which the doctor slept out the heat on lazy days; and over the door was a wide shelf—*Vata*, the natives call it—which Fijians would keep for storing native merchandise, but which the doctor used for siestas, reaching it by a rustic ladder whenever he would sleep secure from the interruptions of his active-minded helpmeet. While he lay there dozing one hot afternoon, he heard a hurried footstep pause on the threshold. His curiosity roused, he peered over the edge, and saw a shadow darkening the shaft of light from the doorway. Then a native stepped in, and ran lightly to the window, drew a ten-inch knife from a hiding-place beneath the floor-mat, approached the mosquito screen on tiptoe to peer within. The doctor's blood ran cold, as he remembered how slight was the impulse that had decided him to take this siesta on the shelf. The figure turned, and he saw with astonishment that it was the timid and submissive Monkey. Monkey an assassin! His black features, if they expressed anything,

seemed to betoken relief rather than disappointment at finding the screen untenanted, and he ran to the doorway as if to secure himself against interruption. No, the knife was not meant for murder. He had the tobacco-bag now, and, with a practised dexterity, whisked the roll of leaf on to a chair, sliced off a good six inches, secreted his spoils in the folds of his sulu, and dropped the bag into its old position with every fold of canvas adjusted as he had found it. Then he took up a broom and marched bravely out to face the world.

The incident had passed with such swiftness, was so incredibly inconsistent with the character of the boy, that Monkey's master gasped, and questioned his senses for symptoms of somnolency. There was the room. He went over the whole seen in mental pantomime to see if any trace of the incident could be found to prove it real. No. The bag was in its usual place, and the folds of the mosquito screen showed no sign of disturbance. Yet stay! There was a difference. On the seat of the chair, surely, there was something that had not been there before. He climbed down from his perch and examined it. Yes! There, in damning evidence on the wooden seat, lay a shred of tobacco leaf. The meek, the gentle, the unsophisticated Monkey had been caught red-handed in the theft. But so exceeding deep did those still waters run,

that he shrank from the vulgarity of taxing the boy with the crime, and crushing his denial with a confession that he had played the eavesdropper. It was better, he thought, to adopt a more original line of protest, and one which would dwell in Monkey's memory when temptation next assailed him.

Accordingly, towards evening he summoned Monkey to his presence, and gravely bade him take his seat on the raised edge of the bed-place as spectator of a theatrical performance. Monkey opened wide his guileless eyes, but did as he was told. Then the doctor stepped out, and, after a dramatic pause, came stealthily to the doorway, ran lightly to the window, drew out the ten-inch knife, peered into the mosquito screen, ran to the door to provide against interruption, pounced upon the bag, sliced off six inches of tobacco roll, concealed his prize in the folds of his cummerbund, restored the bag to its hiding-place, snatched up a broom and stood before Monkey, crying, "How now?" Monkey's mouth fell open and the curls at the front of his scalp began to twitch. The doctor thought that he had missed the point of the performance, and, with the gesture of a conjurer, slowly produced the tobacco from his waistband, and started guiltily. But there had been no need to blunt the delicacy of his satire; Monkey

had understood perfectly. He was calculating distances, that was all, and when he saw beneath his master's arm a clear track to the sunlight he took it. There was a rustling of mats, a disturbance of the air, and the doctor found himself alone in the room. He reached the door too late. Monkey had vanished, and they never met again. For a week or two it was supposed that he was camping in one of the native villages, and would shortly return to beg his master's pardon. But when the weeks ran to months, and the doctor thought of the wages that were mounting up against him, he wisely reported the matter to headquarters. The native police were put in motion, and it was soon known beyond a doubt that no living soul on Kandavu had set eyes upon the runaway. In three months Monkey was forgotten, except by the immigration clerk, who remembered him long enough to carry his return passage money to the credit of the Colonial Treasury.

The months wore into years. The colony having fallen upon evil days, and being no longer able to maintain a European officer in Kandavu, had allowed the doctor to depart to other spheres of usefulness. Years ago Monkey's fellow-voyagers had been paid off in contract trade goods, and returned home in all the bravery of European coat

and trousers, to be stripped naked by their stay-at-home relations as soon as they set foot upon their native beach. Indian coolies overran the country, and the Polynesian labour trade was a thing of the past. Kandavu itself was changed. The chief, whose fervent piety in the days of early conversion had set so admirable an example to his people, had grown too senile and sightless to keep a tight rein upon the younger generation. The influence of the Church had sadly waned, and the youth of both sexes had come to use the Sunday services as a mere aid to shameless flirtation. When this fact became known to the quarterly meeting of missionaries, it was felt at once that a native ecclesiastic of true evangelical zeal was the only possible means of rescuing the island from its backsliding. There was but one man in the whole hierarchy capable of replanting this neglected garden with fruitful seed, and that man was Wesele, Bishop of the Mountains. But there had been that recent incident in Wesele's career round which censorious tongues were still a-wagging; and it was felt that, however successful unconventional methods of conversion may occasionally be, for an elder to dance a devil-dance publicly, in soot and feathers, even from the purest motives, was to court misconception by the ignorant laity. Yet there was no one else whose energy, good-

humour, resource, and fervid pulpiteering so well fitted him to lead back to the fold these scandalously frolicsome lambs, and set them trembling for their future salvation; and thus it was that Bishop Wesele was transferred to Kandavu for a time.

There was not a man in his diocese who heard the news of Wesele's departure without regret. Who would now arrange *tinka* matches to keep the youths out of mischief? who now would make schooling pleasant to the girls, and chaff the aged heathen into going to church, till they dared not let the habit drop? When would he come back again? For, surely, the mountains without him must lapse into paganism, lying under the shadow of Kauvandra, the dwelling of the old gods! And who meantime should prop the sagging, swaying edifice? There was wailing in the Bishop's house that night; for the weaker vessels among the teachers knew not now upon whom to lean, and cried to their pastor to disobey the order, and stay with them. "Without you, sir, we are like a bank of sand thrown up to stay the flowing tide of heathen wickedness. A hurricane has blown the church away, and lo! the elders will snatch away its *vesi* prop and leave it shored up by reeds."

"Boys!" said the Bishop, "the elders of the Church are wiser than we; also Dorcas,"—he looked

a little nervously at his helpmeet—"desires to see Kandavu, having relations there. But who clears his throat without? Bid him come in!"

It was the overland messenger with the weekly mail-bag from the great world of Suva, who, knowing the card suspended from the king-post, "Smoking and Kava-drinking forbidden here," never darkened the episcopal door unless he had great news to chaffer for. This evening he was plainly bursting with tidings, and meant to sell them dearly. Hungering for his news, not a man demeaned himself to question him. Rather they all dissembled their desire in stilted speech. "The road is long, sirs," said the messenger at last; "I must go."

"Long indeed," said the Bishop. "Why not sleep here?"

The man laughed gently, and said, looking at the suspended card—

"Travellers must smoke."

The teachers implored the Bishop with their eyes. Was this great news to be cast out unheard for the sake of an inflexible prohibition? "It is an emergency," said the Bishop softly. "Turn the card to the wall."

In the scented cloud the postman's taciturnity gave way, and none felt the news too dearly bought. "Kandavu, to which you go, sir, is a

heathen land indeed. There are murders every day. So great is the panic in Suva that the foreigners flee to the hills, and the Governor posts armed soldiers about his bed at night. Ships of war have been sent for !”

“*Sombo !*” cried the breathless audience.

“Aye, but herein lies the horror. It is not women, nor men of mean estate who are murdered, but teachers, ministers of the Gospel.”

“Sir, you shall not go,” cried Teacher Ebenezer. But the Bishop calmed him with a glance, and inquired how many of his brethren had fallen.

It appeared that there was but one. On a Sunday afternoon he had crossed a rocky spur to hold services in a distant village. His congregation, after waiting in vain, had set out to meet him, and had found him lying in the path, with his skull cloven, not a mile from the village. The mystery would have remained unsolved, but for the torpor of one of the native police sent to search the ground. Unaccustomed to such a call upon his powers, this officer lay down to rest among the trees, and presently fell asleep. Something startled him into wakefulness. Before him stood a strange being, brandishing a mission axe, with nothing but his own wild locks to cover his nakedness. The constable started up to flee, but the wild man himself took to flight, and sped up-hill with the

rush of a wild boar. Later, when the policeman had had time for reflection, it appeared that the creature was nine feet high, black as a stoker, ugly as a dog-fish ; that he was fanged like a bull-dog, and that flames spurted from his eyes ; that he would certainly have slain the narrator with the huge club he carried, had not an heroic onset put him to flight ; that he covered yards of ground with every stride, and made the earth shake so that pursuit was impossible. A god he was, and no man, or he must surely have been overtaken and brought in handcuffs to the village. Small wonder, then, that the Governor in Suva had posted armed guards about his bed.

Then, a few days later, two men from another village, going up the hills to their yam patch, had seen a human figure on a crag far above them, and when they shouted it sprang from pinnacle to pinnacle over wide abysses which no mortal leap could span, until it was lost to view. But on the same day a teacher on the other side of the island burst into the village, dripping with sweat and foaming at the lips from terror and exhaustion. When words came to him at last, he told how, as he stood on the mountain side, far from any habitation, he heard something crashing through the bush behind him ; and, turning, saw a wild man rushing upon him with uplifted axe ; ran as he had never

run before, with the horror in hot pursuit; felt labouring breath upon his neck, and heard an abortive blow whizz in the air by his left ear, just as a voice in a neighbouring plantation answered his cry for help, and the Thing stopped! This was the last news received in Suva when the mail-bag was sealed.

"The devil!" cried one of the younger teachers, not expletively, but in elucidation of identity.

"No," said the Bishop; "the devil injures men's souls, but not their bodies. It is a man, and seeing that he injures none but teachers, he is a hater of the Church, and secretly practises heathen rites in the bush." (Here he looked meaningly at a grave elder of the village who had quietly entered, and was absently shaving his brown leg with a sheath-knife.) But the Lady Asenath, to whom the Bishop propounded this view at his leave-taking next day, invested it with individual colour.

"Yes, a man, no doubt," she said; "but if he hates the Church he has good cause. Some love-affair, probably, in which a teacher meddled, and now the poor fellow haunts the bush without a mate. No wonder that he is mad, and that his madness thirsts for the blood of teachers. You clergy would emasculate the Viti race, and when one rebels, you cry aloud for help. Send him a mate, or he will slaughter every living thing in the island."

INDISCRETIONS OF LADY ASENATH

Bishop Wesele found Kandavu in a state of panic too acute for the consolations of religion to prevail. Another teacher had been murdered, together with his wife, who seemed to have met her fate because she wore petticoats, for a dozen women, clad in the sulu, escaped unharmed. An attack had been made one night upon a lonely store where a white woman slept alone, her husband being on the sea ; but at the first blow upon the frail door she had discharged a gun, and the assailant fled. His animosity seemed to be directed against persons clad in European dress, white shirts and petticoats. He had been sighted in places far apart at such short intervals of time that some held that he was a god, others that there were two wild men alike in their sooty skin, their dislike of clothes, and their thirst for the blood of teachers. A man-hunt had been organized, and a cordon of men, one hundred yards apart, had scoured the mountain side almost to the topmost peak at the eastern end of the island. But although two of them came suddenly upon the quarry, and even allege that they gave chase to it, it had been easier to overtake a flying fish than this god-footed fugitive. So Kandavu sat in solemn deliberation upon the best means of ridding itself of this terror, the teachers, in the meantime, keeping close at home. And to this council of the

Lords Temporal Bishop Wesele, newly disembarked, was summoned.

"If it were the old time," said an aged Buli, "where would be the difficulty? We should have gone forth with loaded muskets, and shot the Wild Man down where we found him. But the foreigners in the Government do not understand these things."

"Yes," said another bitterly; "we must catch him, and send him bound to Suva, and there he will be arraigned before the Great Tribunal, and will be pardoned, like Manoa the murderess, and the dead teachers will be blamed for letting him slay them."

He must be caught! But how? No mortal could keep pace with him; never could he be taken in open chase. There must be stratagem, and the old chiefs' eyes glistened as they recalled the darling treacheries that made them famous in unregenerate youth. But here was an enemy that would not wait to be lied to; and plots are puerile without a little masterly falsehood to set them afloat.

Then spoke Joshua, the native magistrate, a person of blameless life since middle-age, and much respected for one deep in human wickedness, who had spent, indeed, a portion of his youth before the mast of an American whaler. "This

murderer lives by himself in the bush like a wild beast. Who he is we know not, but this we know, that he is a *luve-ni-yali*—a no-man's-child. Let us catch him as we catch fish."

"What! spear him?" cried his neighbour, with glistening eyes.

"No. There are other fish tools than the spear. Are there not the bait and the trap. What shall be the bait?"

A murmur of applause answered him, and one proposed that a sumptuous feast should be spread high up the mountain side, with constables in hiding all round; another that a girl should be sent to tempt the Wild Man to the village. Everybody had a plan, and liked his own too well to listen to anybody else's. But Joshua shook his head. "How know we that he cares for feasting or love-making. To catch *sanka* we bait our hooks with things that he loves. Now, the Wild Man loves the blood of mission teachers."

"*O Veka!*" cried the listeners. What sacrilege was this? "Let us," he continued with dignity, "let us take a stout policeman, array him in a white shirt like a teacher, and send him out into the bush, while we make a net with wings outspread on either side. Presently the Wild Man will rush upon the policeman, who will flee before

him into our net. The wings will close upon the two and our fish will be entangled!"

The force was strongly represented at the lower end of the council house, and Joshua's proposal was there received with marked coldness. The chief constable was sarcastic even, and asked whether Joshua thought that, shirt or no shirt, any policeman brought face to face with a malefactor would run away? Besides, the bearing of a policeman would proclaim his calling through any disguise. No; if this was to be their trap, let them bait it with a real teacher—a teacher who could run.

The cynicism of the last speech was not lost upon the Bishop. The ministers of the Church, who should have been the leaders of the people, were objects of contemptuous ridicule. "A teacher who could run!" What could his predecessor have been doing to allow such a speech to be possible? He pondered deeply. Here was a chance that might never come again! If it could be shown that the Church dared relieve the police of a duty they had not courage for themselves, much of the lost ground would be recovered. But was it fair to bid any of his trembling sheep to risk their lives in luring this wolf to his destruction? If a dangerous step were necessary for the Church, his should be the work of danger. True,

his last venture had been misunderstood ; but all the more should he efface the impression thereof by a striking success. His mind was made up ; and in the silence that followed the chief constable's speech he said stoutly—

“ I, sirs, will be the bait.”

The entreaties of his clergy, the remonstrances of the secular authorities, fell upon deaf ears. Too old to run ? Not a bit of it. He had not tramped the mountain paths of Tholo for nothing ! Let them look at his legs—mere bundles of wire ; and, if his breath ran a little short at times, he could turn and use his iron-wood staff, and shout for help, and his voice was like the blast of a conch-shell.

Wesele himself posted the “ net ”—a body of twenty policemen hidden by the roadside at the bottom of a steep hill. These were the “ belly ” ; and the wings were the youths of Nakasaleka, spread fan-like on either side up the slope. Then he engaged in prayer, girt his sulu short about his waist, unbuttoned the collar of his white shirt, beamed farewell from his remaining eye, and, staff in hand, set forth upon his errand.

Kandavu rises from the sea a sheer cliff of limestone at its eastern end—a cliff fissured by narrow fertile gorges, in which lie the villages. About its crest the rocks have been flung in fantastic shapes,

and among the trees, which have clambered to its highest ledges, are caves, never entered by the generation which is. For the place is haunted. In one cave, so the gossips tell, lie the bones of a huge monster, that in bygone ages ravaged the island, and was slain at last with the aid of the gods ; in another may still be seen rows of mouldering skeletons, for caves were the burying-places of old time. It was into this region that the Wild Man had been driven by the man-hunters. The heat was stifling, for in these ravines the sea breeze never stirs the air ; and before the Bishop reached the head of the gorge, his starched shirt was clinging to his body like a bath sheet, and the pulses were drumming in the thin vessels of his ears. But he toiled on till he burst from the trees at the foot of a sheer mass of limestone a hundred feet high. At his feet lay the brown thatch of the village, half-smothered in palm-leaves ; all around him rolled the sunny, foam-flecked ocean ; and so blue were sea and sky, that there was scarce a line to mark their meeting-place, save a distant island to the eastward, outlined in indigo against high-piled battlements of cloud. The narrow ledge on which he stood sloped upwards, and, cautiously climbing it, he found a cleft ascending between two pinnacles of rock. He started, for at its very mouth an ancient water-course had fretted

away the stone and formed a shallow cave roofed by the overhanging mass, and in the cave three firebrands smouldered nose to nose. Other things there were—a bed of dry grass; a digging-stick pointed with fire, such as men use for loosening the soil about wild yams; and a staff most curiously grooved, and charred a little in the grooves. This staff was of that rare wood which gives a sure spark when you are rubbing fire; was such a staff as all men used before matches came with the foreigners, for while any pointed stick of dry hard wood will do to rub with, the under-stick, neither too hard to splinter nor too soft to yield kindling dust, is very difficult to find. By the fire were skins of the wild yam, newly pared, as if the tenant of the cave had but just risen to wash hands after a meal.

“Surely,” thought Bishop Wesele, “the Wild Man must be very near his lair.”

And then the rocks became alive with bird-notes, a few at first, growing to a noisy chorus—noisier than when the air is wet with coming rain, and the birds are crying to the gathering clouds. The Bishop grasped his staff, and peered up the glen. A few feet up a young *mbaka* tree had found a foothold, its twining roots cascading down the naked rock, athirst for moisture from the soil, and its leafy branches screening the path

beyond. The earth was bare with the constant wear of feet. The Bishop mounted the roots, parting the branches softly, and saw the glen open into a little grassy amphitheatre, bathed in sunlight. And on the grass, and on the rocks, and on the branches, even of the tree to which he clung, were birds, piping, croaking, hooting, according to their kind, and all were facing and moving towards a spot below him, which he could not see. And in the pauses of their song he heard a single cry : now the reedy notes of the *bithi*, the corncrake ; now the bark of the *thonke*, the pigeon ; the shrill screech of the *lelewai* ; the twitter of the *kikau*, and the little *nkinki* ; and with every changing note the song of the birds whose cry it was broke out fresh in answer. Scarce daring to move a finger for fear of breaking this strange witchcraft, Wesele craned over till his head was thrust beyond the leafy screen. He saw as strange a sight as eyes have looked upon ; for on the grass, reclining lazily against the warm rock, there lay a man—black, lean as a trained hound, and naked. His face the Bishop could not see for the tangled masses of his hair, but every muscle was relaxed in the enjoyment of perfect rest and security. There was a grace in the figure that is not found in man in these days, nor has been since he lived a beast's life before the Age of Stone ; though

Wesele saw it not, being but a hunted animal in the presence of his pursuer.

The wild creature was an animal—the most perfect and graceful of all the animals—and therein consisted his beauty. All about him on the grass were birds: two green parrots waddled up and down before him, making little runs at the cheeky black-headed *teri* when they came too near. With one hand he idly caressed a big brown rat, in the other he held a branch, with which he flapped lazily at the flies, startling the birds about him with every motion of his hand. How could one pity his loneliness when he was among his own people? Suddenly the peaceful scene was changed. The green kakas perched on a sapling shrieked alarm; a big kasanka gull rose screaming from the rocks and flapped heavily away; the little birds ran in towards the Wild Man as if for protection. They had good cause. A starving bush cat, scarred from a hundred fights, was creeping over the rocks, its body flattened to the ground. The Wild Man flung out his arms with a strange hiss, and the birds vanished with a whirr of wings, and a running fire of harsh remonstrances from the parrots. The wretched cat looked hungrily up at them, and then came bounding over the grass to rub its mangy back against the Wild Man's foot. The rat, lying in ecstasy on its back, to let



"ALL ABOUT HIM ON THE GRASS WERE BIRDS."

the black fingers tickle his furry belly, whisked into a crevice with a flirt of his tail. Then the Wild Man stretched himself and yawned, and presently stood up, holding in his hand a piece of wild yam, on which the rat had been feeding. He shouted, his face still turned away, and his savage inarticulate cry sent a shudder down the Bishop's spine. Wesele had seen enough. His heart, stout as ever, was beating so tumultuously that he mistrusted his wind. He had done enough for one day; he would return unseen to the village. But as he set foot again in the ravine he heard an angry grunt, and looking round, saw a great wild sow blocking the outward path with her litter at her heels. She had come in obedience to a naked comrade's call, and here was a shirted man! She bared her teeth and squealed angrily. It was too late to mount the roots again, for Wesele saw a black shadow darken the sunny field beyond the screen. Too late to hide, the accursed shirt was on him; without it he might have been the pursuer; with it he, a Bishop, was a mere hunted animal. He cleared the sow at a bound, scattering wide the squealing piglings. He ran without any effort of volition; he had even space to think. But that wonderful run is a strange haze, dotted with luminous points of memory. He turned the corner by the cave—that he remembers, and

somewhere thereabouts he must have dropped his staff, for before he reached the cover of the trees he had nothing in his hand wherewith to check the onset of his pursuer, whose feet were drumming the ground near twice as fast as his own. Then, after an immense interval of time, he remembers hearing breath labouring close behind him. Trees were rushing past him so fast that they seemed a solid wall, and if he could have stopped his fleeing legs he would have turned aside. Then something whistled past his ear, and he discovered that he had scarce been running at all, and that there lay in him an undreamed-of power of speed. And then, when the nerves of his hinder scalp felt that something cleft the air overhead, his foot caught in a root, and he skimmed along the path face downwards, leaving skin on every projection of the earth. But if he travelled fast, there was one that travelled faster still. Right in the hollow of his back a foot struck him, and caught fast in his arm-pit, and a body struck the earth heavily, and tobogganed painfully along the root-encumbered path. The Bishop, bleeding and half disrobed, was in no plight to rise, and had he wished he could not. For the path ahead was alive with men, and others came crashing through the undergrowth on either side. Right into the belly of the net the bait had drawn the fish, and the wings had closed in.

Fain would I draw a lurid picture of the Wild Man when they turned him over and looked upon his face. The perpetrator of a dozen murders should have borne in his countenance something of the ferocity of his nature, should have carried some trace of his bestial life alone in the woods. But the Wild Man was a real person, and I have neither the heart nor the skill to draw him as he ought to have been. His wrists and ankles fast, he was shipped to Suva, tried for his crimes, and committed to the lunatic asylum, and there it was we met, with a photographic camera between us. I could scarce believe that this was he who had kept a great island in a panic, for before me was a man of sad and gentle mien, with soft eyes full of melancholy contemplation, whose features, hair, and beard irresistibly recalled a certain picture on a cloth—in short, a black Christ. They had given him a waist-cloth, but he had picked it into fine shreds and festooned them about his neck, for the earliest form of clothing was adornment ; they had tempted him with every native luxury, but he would accept nothing but a clay pipe and some vile plug tobacco. We tried to make him speak, but he only looked at us with a certain mild surprise. Only once since he was taken had he made a vocal sound, and that was when a green parrot flew screaming over the asylum grounds, and he cried

to it in its own language. Small wonder that he never spoke, seeing that he was caged so far away from the only friends whose tongue he knew.

Must I tell the Wild Man's fate? The totem marks upon his body, the raised scars upon his back, were found described in the Immigration Office, and he was proved beyond a doubt to be Maqi, No. 8703, introduced from the New Hebrides in 1876, and entered as "absconded" in the books. Two years after his incarceration in the asylum, a schooner chanced to be carrying returned labourers to his islands, and the authorities, arguing that the New Hebrides ought to support their own lunatics, put him aboard. Upon the beach which he had left so many years before he was set down alone and empty-handed, and, as the boat rowed back, his people were seen crowding around him. What became of him? Who knows? They love neither madmen nor paupers in the New Hebrides, and there are no asylums there.

VIII

WRECKERS OF THE WESTERN ISLES

THE land of Nandi is on the confines of the world. True, beyond lies the land of the foreigners, whence the steamers come monthly to Suva, and from the southern point of the bay sweeps a line of islets like a great bow till it touches the Yasawas to the northward. But these last must not be counted with inhabited lands, being but roosting-places for serfs, kitchen-men, ignorant of the usages of polite society. It were, indeed, almost a breach of manners to allude in Nandi to the people of the Mamanutha Islands, except when a feast is toward, and then the kitchen-men had their uses, providing, as was right, the largest share of the victuals.

When the sun is low, and the serrated peaks of Mamanutha are thrown into sharp relief against a crimson sky, one might picture them the broken teeth of a monster, whose mouth is the capacious bay, and whose body the mountainous mass of the

great island. No one goes to Mamanutha, because it is not seemly to accept the hospitality of persons of so lowly an estate, and also, no doubt, because the gods have haunted the rocks and made themselves disagreeable to visitors, ever since the mainland became distasteful to them. Even the orders for contributions that keep Mamanutha in a chronic state of famine do not go direct, but pass circuitously through the Buli of Malolo, a poor relation of Lady Asenath's family.

The gods, as I have hinted, played strange pranks in Mamanutha ; but as no one in Nandi was a whit the worse, the rumour of their antics raised but a feeble curiosity. Much preaching and Sabbath drum-beating had scared them from the mainland, or, as Lady Asenath tersely put it, "the coast had begun to stink of missionaries," and if they chose to purge the islands of every living thing, it would be no concern of the chiefs of Nandi, except at feast-times. Not so Malolo. There the Buli had noted with growing concern a strange restlessness in the spirit world. Scarce a canoe came from Mamanutha without some disquieting report : now a yam-pot was found gutted, though not a soul on the island had so much as looked into the hut ; now the yam-vines were trampled in the night by a giant foot, and there could be no contributions for the chiefs of Nandi ;

now a sudden puff of wind had blown down the school-house, and the children had to go without their lessons ; now the thirsty spirits had sucked the milk from the young cocoa-nuts, and left poor mortals no fruit to make copra withal for their taxes. The mischief wrought by the Immortals was poisoning his rest. No wonder then that when he heard they had appeared in the very flesh to Sharktooth of Mamanutha, had promised him possessions beyond the wealth of storekeepers, and found his whole Bulship ringing with the news, he made ready his canoe, and sailed for Nandi for instructions. Sharktooth, it seemed, had been sitting alone in the doorway of his house, taking the air before sunset. The men were on the beach hauling up the canoes beyond the mark of spring-tide, and the women and children were busy with the cooking-pots for the evening meal. Sharktooth was not asleep—of this he was positive—nor was he excited, nor even deeply pondering ; he was simply, according to his habit, allowing his intellect to rest. He heard no footfall on the threshold ; a shadow fell across the doorway, and a man stepped in and sat down before him in the failing light. Sharktooth had never seen him before, yet he wasted no time in greeting as mortal strangers do. “Sharktooth,” he said, “a month hence you shall have your ship.” (He used the possessive pronoun proper to articles

of food ; it was as if he said, "You shall have a ship to eat.") "On this day of the next moon stand on the rocks of Waya, and you shall have your ship." The stranger then left the house just like a mortal, and was seen no more. Clearly he was a god, because there were but twenty-three grown men on the island, and Sharktooth knew them all ; no strange canoe had landed that day ; and he foretold the future, which no mortal, unless he were a fool, would dare to do.

In the aristocratic circles of Nandi, Buli Malolo's news caused a flutter which was difficult to reconcile with their usual contempt for the doings of Mamannutha. I noted it with concern, remembering that not so many years ago the islands were indeed remorseless teeth that snapped up passing canoes, and Nandi an insatiate maw into which their freight and crews were sucked ; for the islands people lived by wreckage and piracy, and of their superfluity they enabled their suzerains on Nandi to maintain the state proper to their higher civilization and refinement. It seemed to me that something of the old piratical spirit still lingered, despite the influence of the Government and a regular habit of family prayers. I saw Lady Asenath that afternoon, and I said playfully, "So the gods visit mortals in the islands, and Nandi makes ready to stow the wreckage."

“Not only down west are the mortals visited by the gods,” she retorted. “What of the native nuns at Rewa?”

I gently led the conversation back from so scandalous a digression, and begged her, as a woman of good sense and mature experience, to tell me her candid opinion of Sharktooth’s apparition. She at once put by her raillery, and spoke with that serious candour that made her so stimulating a companion.

“That there *are* spirits we know, else how could the Lady Alisi have so fine a family without reproach, being unwedded? Moreover, there is a female spirit in Vatulele, of whom the men tell strange tales, but I believe them not, knowing what all men are. But whether this Sharktooth of Mamanutha saw a spirit face to face, depends upon the reputation of the man. It is said that he is a voracious person, that he will eat a whole hog at a sitting, when he can get one, besides yams in proportion; and if you or I were to eat so much as half a hog, it would lie heavy on us, and we should see spirits in plenty. This Sharktooth is a liar, then; or he is a dreamer of gluttonous dreams; or this Thursday three weeks there will be a wreck on the Waya reefs.”

As the days passed, it was easy to see which solution Nandi had adopted. The great balolo-

fishing was three weeks past, and the fishermen now remembered that the worms had broken up early—an infallible sign of a stormy year. We were in the first month of the hurricane season; already the trade wind had died, and there had been a week of sweltering calm. The village store was doing unremunerative business, for the people seemed to be awaiting some supernatural replenishment of their failing stores, sitting out the evenings in darkness, and going to church in old clothes. Now, white men are mysteriously attracted to places where the veil between the seen and the unseen is worn thin; and having no dignity to lose by intercourse with persons of mean estate, I begged a canoe to carry me to the home of this Sharktooth, favoured of the Immortals. We beached our craft in a little cove too shallow to admit a vessel of deeper draught, and waded ashore to the village, a cluster of wretched hovels built on a bank of parched red earth. The drought had burnt up every shred of vegetation; even the palm-leaves were browned. In the valleys not a drop of fresh water could be found, for the island was a mere fissured hill-top protruding from the sea. We found Sharktooth in the doorway of his ruinous hut, resting his intellect. He was a fat, heavy man, of middle age, with a trick of slow speech and a lack-lustre eye. But he brightened

when we spoke of his ghostly visitation, and his faith would have made his eternal happiness secure had he set it upon a proper object. From the centre-post hung an advertising almanac of Colman's mustard a twelvemonth old, with the twelve preceding days obliterated and a pencilling round December 13, the day appointed by his strange guest. He answered my questions readily enough. Yes, it was still day when the spirit came. He was a red-skinned spirit, growing a little bald on the crown, and he wore nothing but a loin-cloth, not over-clean. His voice was like the voice of men, and he snuffled when he talked, as if he had a cold. But he (Sharktooth) knew him for a spirit, because none but spirits know the future, or leave a house without waiting to share the meal.

"Did the spirit say how your ship should come?" I asked, with an irony that was lost on him.

"On the southern point of the Waya shore-reef. There he told me to await it—my ship!" Again Sharktooth used the possessive pronoun that is reserved for roast pork and such things, unctuously mouthing the syllable as if his stomach were concerned. I could get little more from him about the phantom, so trivial did it seem beside the promise that it brought. There had been, so he admitted, an unusual catch of fish that evening before the appearance came to him, and he had not been "off

his feed" at the feast that followed. I felt irritated with the fat glutton for his quiet confidence and his ghoulish anticipation of a wreck. The ship, the crew, and the cargo were to be for his sole consumption; not the Waya people, whose reef it was, nor the chiefs of Nandi, nor his own kinsfolk were to have any part in it, save what his munificence might accord.

There seemed nothing to detain me in the nightmare of a greedy Fijian. The islet, that took so strange and romantic an aspect from the mainland, had no suggestion of mystery when you stood upon its barren slopes. At sunset a thick curtain of mosquitoes fell upon us, and shut us out from sleep till they had worked their fiendish will, for we had left our nets at Nandi, under the impression that no mosquito could live on a waterless rock at sea. In the morning we were paddled westward down the chain. Not a breath of air ruffled the glassy ocean. As we neared Na Rokorokoyawa (*Salute-from-Afar*), we shipped our paddles and drifted over the clear bottom, scaring the turquoise coral-fish with our shark-like shadow. No thud of rowlocks must here anger the Immortals, for this island is the Olympus of Mamanutha, and the higher gods crowd so thick upon it that there is standing-room for no lesser spirits. Many are the tales told of it: of an unseen power compelling

men to bow them to the earth when they set foot upon its beach ; of strange whistlings in the upper air ; of mysterious assaults and larcenies upon the persons and the property of seafarers. Most fantastic is the island. In by-gone ages land must have been continuous along the chain ; in a few centuries these last records of the past will be crumbled away, and the waves will sweep shorewards over the site. The island is a ruin ; its fallen masonry is scattered about its crumbling base ; the breakers bite deep into its foundations, and in stormy weather set the thunder reverberating in the hidden recesses of its caves. The summer rains have gashed its sides with torrent beds ; great boulders, broken loose from its summit, block the upward path ; here and there a hardy screw-pine, sown by the birds, has found precarious foothold. It is an uncanny spot even in sunlit day ; but who would dare to brave its terrors at dead of night ? A narrow band of sea divides it from Waya, the last of the Yasawas. Lofty, precipitous, harbourless, inhabited by a race of hill-men who know no sea art but that of beguiling ships in distress to their destruction, Waya was well chosen by the gods for a pitfall unto them that sail the deep.

As we hoisted sail to a faint westerly breeze and steered for Nandi, we saw a tiny canoe creep-

ing out from Mamanutha. We neared it as the sun was setting, and saw a single figure at the paddle, setting his course for the haunted isle. Never before had Fijian deliberately passed the night there, even in company, and here was a man braving alone the terrors of the spirit world! Sharktooth was in earnest. He had taken the first step of his pilgrimage, allowing a full ten days for inevitable detention by the way.

The calms lasted another week, and the barometer had been fairly steady. One Tuesday night a light breeze set in from the westward, and the sunset was strange. The sky was cloudless, but a copper haze near the western horizon bloated the setting sun and turned it a smoky yellow. Then the mercury began to "pump," and coasting skippers, who had a glass, put in to the nearest anchorage and made all snug. At Nandi the weather-wise shook their heads, and chatted of 1870, when the whole district was flooded by a tidal wave. But though all agreed with them that rough weather was at hand, none troubled himself to guy his house-posts, or lash down his thatch.

Sharktooth had pushed on to Waya in his frail cockleshell several days before. What passed between him and the spirits on the haunted isle is not known, but they practised no rites of hospitality, for he reached Waya in a state of starvation,

having stayed the cravings of appetite with nothing better than a handful of raw pandanus husks. Communion with spirits had not been good for him. He left his home a person of ordinary intelligence—for a plebeian ; he reached Waya a monomaniac. They told us afterwards how he dragged himself ashore, and groaned aloud with desire, as the pigs filed past him in the village square ; how, pitying his sorry case, and taking him for an emissary of the Government, they set the pot to boil and fed him, but could by no means stay his famished appetite ; how in jest the Buli bade his kitchen-women cook food till the stranger had eaten his fill ; and how meal merged into meal, until in very weariness they could bring him no more. But when all the village slept the stranger left his sleeping-mat, and went and stood on a rock set like a watch-tower at the southern end of the island, staring out to seaward and muttering to himself ; and there the men found him in the morning, when they went fish-spearing. So he passed several days, coming to the Buli's kitchen at meal-times, and retiring to his watch-tower when he was satisfied. But he would talk of nothing but his ship, which was to anchor on the southern point of Waya, where ship never cast anchor before. They thought he belonged to some trading cutter, and had been sent to wait at Waya until she

picked him up. But one night the women, returning from a torch-light fishing, heard a voice crying in the darkness—"My ship! my ship! hither she is sailing! Hasten, my ship!" and so they stood in terror, believing it to be the voice of a sea-sprite. It cried again as sailors challenge the wind—"Child of the Maiden of the West; Child of the Maiden of the White-Man's-Land; board her, waft her quickly hither, my ship!" They stayed to hear no more, and in the village some thought the place was haunted. But others said, more truly, that it was the stranger's voice, and that the gods possessed him.

Now, on the evening when the sun sank in a copper haze, Sharktooth took no food at all, but squatted the day through upon his watch-tower, taking no heed of the children who jeered, and threw lumps of coral at him, from the bluff behind. So long as it was calm he was silent; but when at sunset a cool air from the westward ruffled the oily sea, and a sharp puff or two set the crest upon the swell, and the breast of the sleepy ocean began to heave, and the live rollers to thunder on the reef, he fell to hailing his ship again—the ship that would not come. The boys went home, and the village talked of bringing the madman in by force, lest they should be held responsible for what might befall him.

When the night fell the breeze had freshened from the west—whence the wind so seldom blows—not steadily, but in angry, whistling blasts that set the houses creaking. At midnight men went down to drag the canoes further up, for it was a great gale, and the tide was running in. A faint light from the risen moon threw the shadowy blotches of storm-cloud into relief, as they scudded up the sky. The men came back drenched, for the long drought was over at last, and the rain was lashing the hut walls horizontally and piercing them in a fine mist that soaked the floor mats. There was no sleep that night. Each shrieking blast was fiercer than the last, and as the surf rose, drenching showers of spray struck the thatches like the columns of water from a hydrant. The madman was forgotten; the men blocked their open doorways with mats as best they might, and the women and children huddled shivering in the driest corners, crying—*“Isa! The cyclone!”*

No morning broke nor sun rose; only the blackness of night turned grey enough to make the desolation felt. The men crept out at the back of their huts with their sodden sulus drawn tight about their shoulders, and staggered from one support to another, bracing their bodies against the blast. The palms were thrashing like broken whips, with every leaf stripped off, and every straining trunk

groaning in a living agony. Not a bread-fruit tree was standing ; half the houses were lying collapsed, mere heaps of ruins. To seaward nothing could be seen for the dense curtain of rain. The tide had run out now, and the reef was blown drier than the village square. One glance was enough, for the wind was charged with sand and coral particles, which cut the skin and menaced the eyes. Men shouted to each other, but their voices were torn between their teeth, and one had to guess the sound from the contortion of their lips. For a steady booming roar came from the upper air like the clangour of an express tearing through a tunnel, and dominated all other sounds, the fury of the sea, the shrieks of the blast, and the groaning of the tortured trees. Most of the huts were down now, and their wretched occupants were cowering in the lee of the wreckage, waiting for the fury to pass. As the light grew, a few of the bolder crept along the beach to see what the tempest had brought them. Staggering from rock to rock they went, until in the lifting of the rain-curtain they could see the point of the island. There was the madman, whose existence till now had been forgotten. High on the bluff he stood, propped against the stump of a broken screw-pine, with every muscle braced against the fury of the wind, crying to the storm in a voice that was not heard, in turn

provoking and beseeching it in gestures more eloquent than speech. To the islanders he seemed a welcome touch of farce in so depressing a tragedy. Their taxes, their food, their houses, and their canoes, the product of so many weary months of labour, had all been swept away in an hour. Famine and exposure stared them in the face; the worst was yet to come. And here was this stranger, who had lost nothing, passionately challenging the storm-gods the long night through to send him his ship in weather wherein no ship could live! A little crowd gathered to enjoy the sport, mouthing their jeers to one another, and twisting their rain-washed faces with soundless laughter at every antic more passionate than the last. The village wag even set himself to caricature the madman's gestures, until the wind tore him from his foothold in his most extravagant effort. But presently they wearied of the sport, and one by one they dropped away to forage for raw kumalas to stay their hungry stomachs.

At length a blast, more savage than all that had gone before, wrenched the remaining huts with a sharp list to shoreward, and straightway the wind began to moderate and the rain to cease. But for the lurid half-light, one might have thought that the storm was past. In half-an-hour the air became suddenly still, though there was a menace in it

which those who remembered 1870 knew too well. The roar of the storm had fallen to a distant whirr, as of great wheels revolving far off in the upper air, and the sea, whose rage had been drowned by the racket of the storm, became a new terror. Strange that so maddened a sea should still obey the law of the tide ! Strange that such infuriated surges as strained at the leash to make an end of the poor shivering island should be governed by the same that sufficed to hold them back in their calm mood yesterday ! It was near noon now, and the tide was running in. The low-lying village was at the mercy of the advancing waves, which knew no mercy. Every crash upon the reef set the foundations of the island quaking. Already, though it was barely half-tide, a line of soapy foam had passed the spring-tide limit, and in an air so still that the flame of a candle lighted out of doors would have burned without a flicker, the breakers swelled mountainously. The palms that waved so gracefully yesterday were a mere collection of ragged brooms with the coarse broken bristles set upwards, and the sticks all twisted awry. The air cleared a little, and from the village could be seen the madman running up and down his narrow beat, reiterating his wearisome cry—"My ship ! my ship ! Waft her hither, Child of the Lady of the West !"

The calm lasted twenty minutes, and then the hum of the storm grew louder. There was a moment of shrinking expectation, and an angry puff struck the village, this time from the landward side. The central eddy of the cyclone had passed over the island, and the worst was now to come. In a few moments the full turmoil of the hurricane broke loose afresh from the opposite quarter. The tottering huts, their posts loosened in the sodden ground, were forced upright, then slanting seawards, then flat on the ground in ruinous collapse. The air grew dark again with driving rain. And now a frenzy seized the madman on the bluff. Half-drowned with spray from the rising tide, he had clung defiantly to his stump, but he left it now, not to flee to safer ground, but to tempt the sea from a nearer standpoint. With a hurricane behind him, how could he escape being blown over and engulfed? Yet, to make his foothold less secure, he was dancing a mad dance with his arms aloft, and his body bowed backwards to the earth. "My ship!" he shrieked, flinging his arms to seaward, and the onlookers, following his gestures, sprang up with shouts of astonishment. For there, dim in the storm-mist, swept the ghost of a great ship with broken masts, from which a mass of wreckage hung trailing in the water. Broadside on, she

grew in definition as each mighty roller struck her, swept her decks, pouring in a snowy torrent from the black sides, and swept onward, its white mane streaming backwards from its crest as the tempest struck it, to shatter its vast length on the coral beach. No phantom this, but a real ship of iron plates and frame, fighting her last fight for life. And now three rollers only surged between her and the boiling surf, and every black line of her stood out sharp from the white hell of waters in which she swam. Ah! had she but the merest rag of a sail to set to the gathering wind she might yet have lived; but how could her bare poles withstand the remorseless "send" of the seas that set her shorewards? Nothing could save her now. With the wreckers' instinct, the villagers had run to the bluff whence Sharktooth danced his dance of triumph, and their shouts were borne to him by the wind. He turned upon them savagely and cried—"Away with you—the ship is mine! A gift to me alone! Away with you!" And while he snarled at them the greatest roller of them all surged over the doomed hull, lifted her like a drifting straw, poised her for a moment over the cruel reef, and then thundered down upon the land with a crash that shook the island to its base. In the back-suck the poor battered hull careened seawards, the next wave lifted and flung her on

the rock with a grinding thud, and the third failed to lift her at all, but washed through her broken sides and left her stranded for ever.

In this wonder the women and children had joined the men, and the destruction of the village was forgotten. The tide had burst its appointed bounds. Each pursuing wave had swept higher among the trees; hut after hut had been broken up, submerged, and buried in sand and wrack; three feet of eddying water covered the floor of the church; the village was gone.

Things now began to wash ashore from the wreck—a water-cask and an oar, bearing the name “Altmore,” two gratings, and a few empty bottles from the steward’s pantry. Upon each of these prizes the villagers pounced, heedless of the imprecations of the man who claimed the ship and all she held. So busy were they that none noted what was passing on the wreck. There was life about her still: two men clinging to the wreckage of the bulwarks gazed at the wild shore and the wilder band of wreckers. An antiquated copy of the sailing directions had told them all they wanted to know about Fiji, of the horrors of the old time of pillage and cannibalism, and, far before trusting themselves on that beach, they preferred the crazy hull as long as she would hold together. They were wrong, of course. The men

of Waya would have seized the cargo, and shared it generously with their shipwrecked guests.

So hour followed hour, until, late in the afternoon, the wind had abated, and the ebb had left the water on the reef scarce shoulder deep. It was time for the villagers, unless they would be benighted, to bring the shipwrecked crew to a place of safety, for in the next high tide the ship might go to pieces. But the mad stranger barred the way, standing knee-deep, and striking at all who would wade out towards his ship. Then it seemed to the sailors that the time had come to try their strength. One of these savages was wading out to the ship, and the wind bore his wild cries faintly to them. It was Sharktooth, frenzied by those who would rob him of his own, coming out to take possession of the gift of the Immortals. On he came, and the sailors, taking him for the leader of a body of assailants, caught up weapons and prepared to receive him.

The wind and tide bore him swiftly to the hull, and he had grasped the wreck of the rigging before the sailors hailed him. "Let go there!" they shouted menacingly in English.

"My ship!" he cried. "This is my ship—a gift to me alone!" It was easy to run up the side of his ship as she lay careened; he never stopped to think that any would dispute the justice of his

claim ; and when he reached the sloping deck and felt the joy of possession in his soul, he stamped upon the planking and laughed aloud, shouting derisive defiance to his rivals on the beach. And as he stood looking shorewards, the sailors, supposing the leader of the cannibals to be calling his followers to the attack, struck him full on the head with a capstan bar.

“ See,” he was crying at the moment, “ the ship is mine ! ” And he fell backwards close to a breach in the combings of the broken hatch, and, sliding down the slope of the deck, plunged head-foremost into the hold, and was seen no more. So the ship was his own at last.

IX

LADY ASENATH IN THE WITNESS-BOX

“SHALL I tell you the whole truth, concealing nothing?” asked the Lady Asenath in a burst of frankness; and I, though set to make judicial inquiry of her, for the first time, perhaps, since witnesses were sworn to speak the whole truth and nothing but the truth, demurred. A great burden of responsibility lay upon me, and as I looked into the innocent eyes of my fellow-commissioners, and reflected that with a full knowledge of the quality of Lady Asenath’s reminiscences, I had advised them to call her as a witness on so delicate an issue as the decrease of her race, my spirit quailed. They were grave, serious, and scientific, these colleagues of mine; they had taken up their pens in a spirit of sober research, and I, without a shade of warning, had led them over a mine which, if it exploded, would blast their confidence in my sincerity, and leave their innocence, if not their gravity, impaired for ever.

Let it not be thought that I had summoned Lady Asenath without misgiving. Many times had I mentally planned a scheme of questions that would head her off from anecdote, and keep her within the fence of disputed custom of the olden time. To academic questions in native obstetric practice I had a right to expect answers free from dissertation on human frailty. How was I to foresee that a question on the social status of Fijian lady physicians would undam a reservoir of intimate adventure?

The whole truth? None knew better than I what that meant. Not a village through the length and breadth of Fiji but had discussed the Commission appointed to investigate the causes of the decrease of the native population. And Lady Asenath's views had been so unconventional and so freely imparted, that I had had more than one occasion for remonstrance. And if I, so schooled by custom to make allowances, had been provoked to censure, what would my poor colleagues do if they heard her out? "Wait a moment," I said, with an effort to keep my voice from shaking; "wait a moment, and be kind enough to answer my questions first, and then we will hear your opinion."

"I think," interrupted one of my colleagues in English, "that we are more likely to learn new

facts if we let her have her say out than if we confine her to question and answer." New facts! That they would, and newer than they dreamed of.

"On your head be it," I murmured, and signed to Lady Asenath to proceed.

Now, thus stood the question. The Fijians have a higher birth-rate than any European country except Hungary, and they are probably the only race in the world which with a high birth-rate is yet decreasing. Nor is the mortality excessive among adults; the enormous death-rate is crowded into the years of infancy. There were born children enough and to spare. The problem was to keep them alive; and when the Government had exhausted the machinery of the Native Office in striving to awaken the race to a sense of its peril without reducing the death-rate by an unit, it adopted the expedient familiar to all baffled Governments, and appointed a Commission of Inquiry. Nay, it had done more. Honestly minded to thrash some grains of truth out of the stacks of theory that cumbered the ground, it had sent a circular to the leading planters, missionaries, and magistrates, inviting them to diagnose the malady and prescribe a remedy; and very pretty was the result. The Fijians, it appeared from the collected replies, were suffering from a combination of every known physical, moral, and

social disease in its most acute form. Collectively they were cankered through and through with monogamy, in-breeding, unchivalry, communism, and dirt; individually by insouciance, foreign diseases, kava-drinking, and excessive smoking. The salvation of the race could only be attained by bottle-feeding and the cultivation of football; by coroners' inquests and the keeping of cows; by securing the young gallants from sunset to dawn under lock and key, and turning lady missionaries loose among the maidens. There were a hundred other suggestions from which one stood out pre-eminent for grand simplicity: it was, "Representative Government and Home Rule," and the propounder of this remedy—all honour to him!—was an Irishman.

So far the secret springs of information had not been tapped. Upon this question of their own decay, about which foreigners contended in heated argument, the natives displayed a languid unconcern. "Will the race die out in our time? No? In our grandchildren's, then? Yes? Dear me!" was all that the most lurid prophecy could draw from them. Yet they alone held the key to the mysteries of the "Wise Women" who played such havoc in the native nurseries. Day after day we sat *in camera*, patiently drawing admissions from native witnesses upon whose weaknesses we played

with questions cunningly planned to disarm suspicion, piecing the scraps of evidence together, until we thought we knew as much of the secret villainies of native midwifery as the most hardened practitioner of them all. And what a caste they were, those Wise Women! Medical witnesses in England could not show a haughtier contempt for lay opinion, greater professional reticence, or more bitter resentment against unqualified practitioners, than those grim old ladies who guarded the secrets revealed to them by their mothers, to hand them down inviolate to their own daughters. Happily for us, one of them had been cheated of the promised fee, and our sympathetic references to this painful subject, coupled with the hope that we could see justice done to her, had softened her into garrulousness. All we wanted now was the evidence of a native lady of quick intelligence and wide experience, old enough to be versed in all native lore unconfused by Christian teaching, and possessed of such experience in midwifery as an amateur with a pure love of the science is able to acquire. All these the Lady Asenath had, and for intelligence, throughout the length and breadth of the islands, there was not a witness to touch her.

I can see her now, as she paused in the doorway waiting for a more pressing invitation with the

diffidence prescribed by good breeding. A tall and stately figure, a little withered by advancing years, but graceful withal from a lithe quickness of movement which told of a fire still burning somewhere within. Care had nothing to do with the myriad wrinkles about her eyes and forehead, but rather a habit of raising her eyebrows, which, like her mobile lips, were never still, and merriment, always lurking in her bright eyes, turned her laboured seriousness into a mocking of gravity. The very cut of her pink pinafore, and the knot of her sulu, hinted coquetry, for all their deference in outward form to the fashion prescribed for ladies past middle age.

Though it is unusual for ladies of rank to pay visits unattended, I had begged her to waive convention, and leave Ruth and the Pussy-cat at home, lest some regard for their comparatively untainted morals—which I must confess had never yet appeared to trouble her—might lay constraint upon her revelations.

Her features wore a decorum that almost reassured me as she turned to address the medical member. Perhaps the responsibility of her position as the spokeswoman of her race, the table groaning under the burden of office stationery, or the serious bearing of her inquisitors, weighed upon her spirits. A dozen new wrinkles in her brow contradicted the wicked brightness of her eyes.

"The causes of the decline of the land, gentlemen," she began in melancholy accent, "are two-fold. Firstly, the women are to blame, and secondly the men."

"How old are you?" interrupted the statistician, pen in hand.

"My eldest son was so high when the measles raged. Now we women——"

"That would make her fifty-two or fifty-three."

We gravely noted the age as if it had a bearing on her real temperament.

"Gentlemen, I will tell you the whole truth. We Fijian women——"

"What do the people say about this Commission of Inquiry?" I interposed irrelevantly, for I had caught a dangerous twinkle in her eye.

"Who shall say? We eat and we sleep. We do not cast these things over in our minds as you do. To us it appears most strange that you foreigners should trouble yourselves about what becomes of us when you might be looking after your own affairs. Now, we women know many strange things. Shall I tell you?"

"That is worth recording," said the statistician. "It is an epitome of the native mind." But the medical member caught a professional ring in the last sentence.

"Tell us," he said, "what you know of the practices of the persons known as 'Wise Women.'"

She laughed softly to herself. "At births?" she inquired, stifling her amusement. "Why, I am a Wise Woman myself." And, shutting us laymen out with her right shoulder, she plunged into a highly technical *tête-à-tête* with the medical member, chuckling now and again at his intimate knowledge of what she chose to call "women's matters."

I saw what was coming. To gauge the exact anatomical knowledge, and record the nomenclature of these lady surgeons, the medical member had a book of coloured plates. There would come a moment when the Lady Asenath's knowledge of physiology would be put to the test, and lest I should be a party to what might follow, I rose and drew my fellow-layman to the window to look at the palms in the verandah. My alarms were justified; first there came a hush of expectancy, and then a burst of suppressed merriment, and little spurts of laughter with every rustle of the book leaves. I caught the native nomenclature too, drawn from every-day analogies, most slangy and unscientific to my initiated ear. It was high time to interrupt them, for already the barrier of decorum, so carefully reared, had collapsed, and novel and most startling relations between the

Commission and its witness established over its ruins. The picture-book had done it all. When we took our seats at the table Lady Asenath was confidential and a little reproachful, as who should say, "Thank Heaven we are done with your solemn nonsense, but why couldn't you say at first what you really wanted?"

What we really wanted was anything but what we got. Her discourse now ranged over matters highly curious, it is true, but more suited to the evening kava-bowl than a sober Commission of Inquiry. The medical member gazed sadly at his colleagues; the statistician concealed his countenance behind a shaking hand; and I—I lent a modest ear, knowing that never again would it be mine to have the riches of a specialist's half-century of experience showered at my feet. With a wealth of compromising anecdote fell many shrewd reflections, and sometimes a timely question dug a little channel to divert the stream. But these were mere back-waters, and for half-an-hour the river of anecdote flowed on without a check.

Yes, at Nandi a girl was the property of her father's sister's son if he cared to take her, which he always did unless she was marred by deformity. Did they marry? Sometimes, but not so often now, because it was a waste. If young men were wise, they married other people, because their

cousins were theirs all the same whether they married them or not. Now, her own nephew, Man-o'-War, the canteen-keeper at Fort Carnarvon, had so many little cousins that——

His father's *brothers'* daughters? Good gracious, no! *They* were his sisters, and he was not allowed to speak to them. If he came into one door of a house where they were sitting, they were bound to go out at the other. That was because he could not marry them. It was the *tabu*. "Oh, the decrease, yes, I am coming to that. Now, we women——"

"There are some who say it is caused by the abolition of polygamy."

She chuckled. "Shall I tell you the whole truth? Well, thus lies the matter. Before the missionaries came, our chiefs, it is true, had many wives, but the commoners had but one, and some were in very pitiable case, having to go without altogether. In those days every man tilled his own garden and dared not trespass. But now what have they to fear? Eternal flames, so say you foreign gentlemen, but the fire comes after death, and these are living men with beauteous women all around. In these days every man is married once according to the Church, and more times than you can count according to his wishes. Which of these is polygamy?"

“Ah. This is the young men’s age. And we women—— An old maid, did you say? Have I ever known one? What a question! Let me think a little. Yes, I do remember one: Navusi she was called, and people came from far to look at her, poor thing; a jest of the country-side she was. Now we women——” She giggled like a school-girl.

“Yes, tell us about the women,” said the medical member encouragingly. She reached across the table to slap him playfully on the arm.

“There are two things by which we women come to grief in these days. One is called *Viakila*—Curiosity, and the other *Tangaya*—Consternation. In these days everything is new. Girls want to roam about the country and see life. They want fine clothes and night dances and fun. That is *Viakila*. Suddenly they find that something has happened to them” (she winked comprehensively at the Board)—“and how are they to provide for a child, and meet the reproaches of their elders? Then they seek out a Wise Woman, and present an offering, beseeching her to free them from the impending danger. This is Consternation.”

“And what does the Wise Woman do?”

“She tells them that they should not listen to the Voices of the Night.”

“All this is very deplorable,” murmured the medical member, “but not peculiar to the Fijians.”

"If I remember aright," observed the statistician to the ceiling, "we were asked to call this witness as being certain to throw a new light upon our sub-section, 'The Condition of Women!'"

"Lady Asenath," I said sternly, "we beg of you to tell us about the lives of women before the coming of the foreigners."

She chuckled, and, I verily believe, kicked the medical member under the table. "When I was a girl we were afraid to follow our fancies."—"I'll bet *she* wasn't," murmured a voice.)—"We did all things according to custom, obeying our elders, planting the yams, fishing, and marrying our cousins when we were old enough. Those who did wrong fell ill, or were beaten or killed, and the others feared the more; but now, what has a girl to fear? A few mats to plait, expulsion by the teacher if she is a communicant. That is all, unless she is imprudent, and does not see the Wise Woman. Ah, this is the age to live in."

"In those days, then, the girls never got into trouble?"

She covered her face with her lean hands, but loosely, so that one eye glimmered through her sparse fingers, and for some moments her pinafore quivered with suppressed emotion.

"Why, what's the matter now?" cried my colleagues. "Do pull her together; she's your witness."

"Lady Asenath—" I began. The gleaming eye was on me.

"Do you wish me—to tell you—the whole truth?" she stammered in a hollow voice, with catches in her breath that I greatly feared were due to merriment.

"Speak on ; of course we do."

"I—that sit before you—I—too—have been—a sinner!"

"Good Heavens!" cried the medical member. "This isn't a confessional."

The hesitation, the shrouded countenance, and the hollow tone were all mere concessions to conventional modesty, for now that the first plunge was taken she swam smoothly on into a sea of confession, and revelled in the most personal details. No, her meek spouse, Luke, was not the offender, but a gay young dog of more exalted rank. It had shaken the foundations of society, and imperilled the peace of two states, this youthful iniquity of hers. And, we were led to infer, the fair sinner escaped the consequences of her crime against society rather from the accident of birth than any palliating circumstances in delinquency. Indeed,—I blush to say it—there seemed to have been no element of innocence betrayed, unless, indeed, her partner could have pleaded it, and this can never now be known, seeing that the measles

gathered him to his fathers twenty years ago. Still, I like to think that in this she was doing herself an injustice, and that on that night of long ago, on that moonlit shore which she described so graphically, through the cool splash of the wavelets on the shingle, there were, even in her case, Voices of the Night to which she listened.

There was no need to ply her with questions, no possibility of checking her. We simply sat dazed and unresisting, and let her stream of compromising revelation surge over us. It was a *chronique scandaleuse*, if you like. From heathen girlhood to Christian middle-age her creed had been the same—to make life pleasant to the young, although in that far-off girlhood she had interpreted it as a personal call to arms; while, since youth was past, her mission had been purged of all selfishness, and she had been content to direct the campaign against Calvinism with a marshal's bâton. Nothing was spared us; no detail was too trivial to record; no name too honoured to be left unsmutched; no adventure too scandalous for plain portrayal. Lavish of subtle metaphor, prodigal of illustration, her story was yet an inexhaustible mine for the anthropologist. Strange customs, stranger superstitions, were dangled a tantalizing moment before our eyes, only to be snatched away in order to give place to a dis-

composing illustration ; shameful rites undreamed of by mission or Government were darkly hinted at in enticing parenthesis. Skeletons were dragged clattering from the cupboards of every family from the Singatoka to Malolo. She knew something disgraceful about all of them, and what she did not know she guessed. If she paused at all it was to giggle with pure merriment, to shade her roguish eyes when a point was coming, or to slap her bewildered friend, the medical member, with caressing playfulness, for she talked scandal in no spirit of carping criticism, but rather in keen sympathy and unwearying appreciation.

We learned many things that day ; the curious physiological fact which taught the Fijians to drive the new-made father forth into bachelor society until his child was fully three years old and weaned, a custom fast vanishing now because the missionaries preach the English ideal of family life ; the *Vei-sangani-tani*, strangest relic of the *Couvade*, by which the health of the suckling babe is watched as the barometer of its sire's conjugal fidelity—for so, she assured us, are the sins of the fathers visited on the children. We learned that day what were the maddening delights of the *veimoko* ; the mad orgies of the heathen dances in honour of the *luve-ni-wai* ; the wild frolic of Catch-who-catch-can in the warm sea ; the real

mysteries of the rites of the first-fruits; the true motive of the mountaineers who persisted in tattooing their maidens in defiance of the Church. It was Rabelais let loose, plus the lost text of the "Scented Garden," with Sir Richard's footnotes to the "Thousand Nights and a Night" thrown in.

Not a question had stemmed the torrent of her confidences, but our silence proved a more stimulating goad than the loudest approbation. There was nothing, I solemnly declare, in the demeanour of any of us to invite her to expand, and yet at the last she grew to think herself among kindred spirits, and to take us to her heart as the most sympathetic and sensible listeners she had ever had. And when the twilight fell upon one last side-splitting jest, and she rose to take her leave, she infused into her parting a sense of jolly partnership between people of the broadest views. From the twilight of the verandah she cried playfully in the dialect of her province, "*Veka; keimani' na kuai Nandi!*" which being freely interpreted is, "Oh, we of Nandi, what gay dogs we are!"

When she was gone the Board sat silent awhile, like men recovering from intoxication, and sober judgment began to slink back to the Board-room. The members toyed with pens, and when they spoke, looked over-earnestly at their papers the while.

“Thank Heaven she came alone!” said one devoutly. “More than half she told us ought to be recorded—in Latin.”

“In Sanskrit,” corrected the medical member. Then, turning upon me, he cried almost savagely, “She was your witness ; did you know she was going to do this ?” and while I stammered a reply, the statistician came boldly to the rescue of my character.

“It was the picture-book,” he declared with conviction. It may have been the effect of failing light, but I thought that they both looked older.

X

A SKETCH IN CHARACTER

NANDI BAY is not beloved of navigating lieutenants, for when you are through the Malolo passage, and the Admiralty chart shows a clear stretch of water to Vunda Cape, you find that, with strange perversity, the coral-builders have strewn your path with great toadstool patches of rock, cunningly contrived just to catch your keel without showing green through the two fathoms of calm water that covers them. There are those who even assert that the bottom of Nandi Bay undulates like a canvas ocean stirred by clockwork; and among these are the officers of H.M.S. *Vivid*, who were sent to survey the bay after the ship had ploughed a deep furrow in the coral of a patch not marked in the chart. They began their work without enthusiasm; they left it with regret; for Nandi, never before having had such distinguished guests to entertain, was at pains to show them

what South Sea hospitality might be. The first boat's crew that went ashore brought reports to the ward-room of a lady of exalted rank who had received them with a tact and a resourcefulness that gave them quite a new opinion of native entertainment.

"There's a wonderful old girl on shore," they said, with characteristic irreverence, "who bosses the whole country, and keeps a house full of maids of honour to dance to visitors."

Their hours of work taught them much about the bottom of the sea, their hard-earned hours of recreation taught them even more about the social life on shore. There were picnics to the caves of Koromba, water sports in the delicious stream at Rusia, in which a lieutenant came near drowning in a mimic combat with brown water nymphs, torch-light dances in the palm groves behind the village. They took in a fresh store of ward-room anecdote, and replenished their rusty armoury of chaff against their professional butt, the doctor, with a newer and more formidable equipment. The sayings, and I fear the stories, of their friend on shore became classical quotations that filtered through every ship in commission on the station, and at the end of three weeks they parted from her as from a lifelong friend of their own race, with banter on their lips and mourning

in their hearts. When I rallied Lady Asenath afterwards on her vast popularity with the British Navy, she screwed up her eyes, and remarked that they were right good fellows with no nonsense about them, and that her heart had gone out to them, all friendless there in a foreign country, without a woman to take care of them. She had done her best to make their sojourn pleasant to them, she added modestly, and she had not found them difficult to amuse, seeing that they were, as she chose to put it, "real men."

There were, of course, great doings when the flag-ship came to Suva. For the white people, there were dances on shore and on board, and when these had had their round something was to be done to amuse and impress the brown people, since with them amusement is wisely combined with wholesome instruction. Invitations went forth through the Native Office. On the appointed day a mine was laid in the open water of the harbour, and buoyed with a flag, photograph albums were laid on the cabin table, interpreters were engaged, and spittoons were set in inviting corners of the quarter-deck. At noon the canoes and boats began to creep off towards the ship; elderly chiefs in all the dignity of gnatu robes ascended the ladder, young nobles of Bau, in their smartest serge tunics, swaggered about the deck

with the *blasé* air of men who had seen it all before, and had only come for the sake of the cigars; Roko Tui Dreketi, disgracefully drunk, was headed off, and ordered home by a Native Office boat, and the entertainment waited only for the Lord of Bau, who, as eldest son of King Thakombau, knew better than to cheapen his arrival by punctuality. At length his smart gig rounded the point, with the clean fast stroke of rowers who know that the eyes of the gallery are upon them. In the stern sat the great man himself, bolt upright, like a fat bronze idol, with his lovely daughter Andi Thakombau beside him. He had the showman's instinct for timing his arrival. As he shot alongside, the assembled chiefs shouted the *tama* of respect, an officer stood at the foot of the ladder to help him from the boat, another waited in the gangway to present him to the Admiral, a guard was drawn up to receive him as if he were the Governor. His manners were not gracious, because he knew that more time would be spent in amusing him if he feigned indifference. But he inspected the guns with the attention of a man who has kept cannon himself in his time, and knows their points. Lady Thakombau had a dozen officers about her from the moment she touched the deck. She too was determined not to be amused. Her rank and her beauty alike

demanded an attitude of reserve, and she sipped her tea with haughty indifference, and turned the pages of the albums with a scornful curl of the lip. But she was so tall and graceful, and used her flashing eyes so cleverly, that her hosts refused to be discouraged so long as they could coax the suggestion of a smile from her. When they laid her Majesty's portrait before her, it diverted them to find her imagining that the usual fate of the flag-ship was to be tied by a painter, beam to beam with the entire British Navy, to a sort of quay at the gate of Buckingham Palace in London, so that "Vikatoria's" eye could rove along the line from the doorway of the palace when she rose in the morning, just as her father surveyed his canoes at Bau. Late in the afternoon one of the *Vivid's* boats approached from the shore, with an officer and three native companions seated in the stern.

"Who are these, Dixon?" asked the lieutenant in the gangway, for the ladies' faces were hidden by a large alpaca umbrella.

"I've found her! The old girl from Nandi we told you about," replied Dixon, with dancing eyes. "She was in the town with her girls. Those idiots on shore had forgotten to ask her, so I brought her off!"

The word had passed from mouth to mouth, and something like a decorous cheer went up from

the ward-room officers of H.M.S. *Vivid*, who were helping to dispense the hospitalities of the flagship. Beauty ever yields to wit. In a moment Lady Thakombau was deserted, and Lady Asenath stepped down upon the deck with the easy self-possession of one who is accustomed to receive demonstrative welcome from her friends. When she saw that her two maidens were abashed at the splendour of the scene, and shrunk awestruck from the august company in which they found themselves, she asked that they might be sent forward under the care of an elderly quartermaster. She, meanwhile, had no need of reserve to support her rank. Whether she talked with the Admiral, or rallied her friends of the *Vivid* upon their reminiscences of Nandi, or criticized the photographs with which the walls of the officers' cabins were decorated, she had all the easy freedom of a woman of the world, who knows how to carry herself in every social occasion and in every company. Once only did she deviate from the etiquette prescribed for the guests of officers, and that was when the splendid proportions of one of the bluejackets stationed at a gun won her involuntary admiration, and drew her to feel his brawny arm, and punch him playfully in the ribs. "A man indeed!" she was understood to say as she smiled upon him. She greeted such of the native chiefs as she knew

with graceful ease, and politely ignored the stares of the ladies of Bau, who affect to despise the aristocracy of the West. And when at last the evening drew on, and a table was rigged on the quarter-deck for the electric button which was to explode the mine, she was acclaimed as the proper person to set free the fatal spark. At first she did not understand.

"You see that flag," said the interpreter, indicating the buoy; "you are to keep your eyes upon it while you press this button with your finger. There will be an explosion, the water will shoot up into the sky, and the sea will be covered with dead fish. And your hand will have done it."

"*O Veka!*" she exclaimed, "an old woman like me to do this, while all these noble ladies sit laughing to see me turn green with fear, and perchance lay my length along the deck. For this you must have a young girl of noble birth, who will not show her fear even if she feels it. Why, there is Lady Thakombau, and none of you have asked her."

The poor girl, deserted by her fickle hosts, was nursing her resentment on a sofa at a distance from the crowd. She saw the "upstart Nandi woman" point her out, and would have refused the invitation, had she felt sure of being pressed. As it was she rose sulkily enough, and lounged towards

the table with over-acted indifference, scarce listening to the minute instructions of the interpreter. All eyes were fixed upon the buoy on which the little flag rocked and bobbed to the ripple, all eyes but Lady Asenath's, which were fixed upon the Bau princess with amused anticipation. A touch of human nature was more to her than a thousand ear-splitting explosions.

"Watch her," she whispered to one of the *Vivids*, who caught her meaning from her animated gesture. "Note how these great Bau ladies carry their rank. Very imposing, is it not? Presently the powder will go off, and then——"

And, in truth, the King's granddaughter did carry herself bravely. "They want me to touch this button?" she asked, laying one slim finger upon the ivory. She looked round at the circle of anxious faces with a contemptuous curl of the lip. It did her little soul good to feel them dependent upon her royal will, and she toyed with their suspense in order to force them to admire her magnificent indifference. And when they did, and she had even the Admiral's impatient eyes upon her, she could not conceal her satisfaction. Then, without thinking what she did, she pressed the ivory knob; a spark flashed into life in the heart of an ugly package that lay five fathoms deep on a lump of coral, where the azure coral fish swam

idly up and down ; the caged devil in the package burst its bonds, spreading death and destruction all around, shooting a lofty pillar of green water into the air, with a shock that shivered the mighty steel frame of the ship, and split the ears of those that stood upon her. Great waves swept outwards in a widening circle, and as the tortured water grew calm, the iridescent bellies of myriads of dying fish began to gleam white through the streaks of foam. A deep-toned shout burst from the dusky multitude. They surged backward from the railing and overturned the table. One only of them all did not flinch at the explosion, and that one a woman. And in the awestruck silence a woman's laugh set loose the pent emotions of the rest. For, watching Lady Thakombau, Asenath had seen the scornful smile freeze on her lips to a grin of terror, the rich brown of her cheek turn to a deathly green, the sinews of her knees give way under her till she sank on the deck, and crawled backwards to the ladder, like any slave woman brought suddenly face to face with an angry chief—crawled into the darkest corner of the deck under the shadow of a gun-carriage, and lay there, huddled, limp, listless, and sick, with all the spirit stricken out of her, a mark for the derision of any that cared to moralize upon her, past caring what the meanest of them might say.

When the excitement had subsided, and the officers had time to look about them, she was missed. Lady Asenath, too, had vanished, none knew whither. "Scared at the explosion? Not a bit of it," said the paymaster of the *Vivid*, who had been standing at her side. "She stood like a rock, and I heard her laughing when the table went over." They hunted for them high and low without a clue, until a quartermaster remembered having seen an old native woman trying to carry a young one from under a gun, and grinned as he recalled the manner of his rebuff. He had seen them last near the companion-way. At this juncture the flag lieutenant broke in upon the search party from the regions below. "Come quick, you fellows," he cried, "and bring some one who can speak the lingo." He led the way towards the hallowed precincts of the Admiral's cabin. Led by a voice, talking outlandish English in accents that seemed curiously familiar despite its halting phrase, they passed on tiptoe through the outer room, and peered over their guide's shoulder through the doorway of the inner, freezing stiff with amaze at what they saw. For right before them on the floor sat the Bau princess, still with the sickly hue of terror, but with the lax muscles about the mouth drawing into unwilling laughter. Panic does not yoke with mirth, and

how, being human, could she watch the amazing performance at her side and contain? For a preposterous figure, bedight in a cocked hat (the Admiral's), and a sword-belt buckled over its chemise, with an arm cast amorously about the princess's waist, was leering and ogling her, chattering love-talk in an atrocious compound of pidgin-English and dog-Fijian. And the worst remains to tell. In the accent and gesture there was not one but recognized a cruel caricature of the surgeon of the *Vivid*, the most assiduous of Lady Asenath's visitors at Nandi. It hit him off to the life, and none could doubt that the entire performance, love-making and all, had been studied from the life, probably with the Pussy-cat cast for the super's part. Even the Samaritan intention of curing the princess of her nervous prostration could be no excuse for this, and when the shameful parody threatened to pass the very bounds of farce, and the audience, weak with suppressed laughter, burst through the doorway, clinging together for support, the Lady Asenath herself was abashed for once, and sprang up, dashing the cocked hat upon the cabin floor. "Confess it was the doctor!" cried one as soon as he was able to articulate. But she would not, stoutly maintaining, on the contrary, that it was a

Fijian tale she told and mimed to divert the Lady Thakombau from her panic.

Two of the *Vivids* drew apart from the rest. "Isn't she grand?" said one; "the doctor will have a poorish time, the hypocritical old satyr!" The other was grave and absent.

"It is humiliating to know what these natives really think of us," he answered irrelevantly. He seemed to be going step by step over his own holidays ashore in Nandi Bay.

XI

THE GREAT NANGA SCANDAL

IF I had been asked to cite a person who seemed to me unlikely to take an interest in antiquarian research I should have named the Lady Asenath. The ways of foreigners who poke about in caves, and ask silly questions about the site of some deserted village, have ceased to excite speculation among her countrymen, but with Lady Asenath the case was different. Foreigners, she was wont to declare, were no mystery to her, being but men and women like the rest. Their motives in making detailed inquiries into ancient customs, she even hinted, were perfectly familiar to her, but she herself was so keenly set upon unravelling the tangled affairs of the present that she had no attention for the past. And so, when I chanced to mention that I had been Nanga-hunting, I was astonished by her interest. It seemed to me only another proof of this remarkable woman's versatility.

"All that I understand," she said, when I described the outward appearance of the Nanga. 'Any one can see the outward form of a thing, a witch's love-charm, for instance. What one wants to know is, how it is used."

This was precisely the point on which I could not enlighten her. The Nanga was going through the course ordained for ancient monuments in distant lands ; that is to say, it had been deserted and forgotten until an Englishman re-discovered it, and wormed some portion of its history out of its unwilling neighbours. His discoveries were published, discussed, and fought over by eminent anthropologists, and just as the subject was worn threadbare, a quasi-scientific German discovered it all over again, and having gleaned a few straws of information, crushed them into a tangled theory, and blew his trumpet through the length and breadth of the European press, claiming the honours due to a learned and intrepid traveller who has faced death in the course of scientific discovery. In the matter of the learned and intrepid Dr. Wulff, however, I am anticipating.

Ruined Nangas, then, had been seen by a dozen Europeans. The hereditary priests of the deserted shrines had been identified, and adroitly cross-examined, and it was generally agreed that the region of the cult was limited to a few square miles

in the very centre of the island. Whispers had been heard of an offshoot on the western coast extending to Nandi Bay itself, but these rumours had been forgotten when I stumbled by chance upon a Nanga hidden away in the dense bush on the southern coast a few miles west of Serua. Close questioning of the elders of the neighbouring villages brought to light four more of the holy places; and I pressed my inquiries home, until I had elicited the names of the priests who had officiated at the last celebration, and the general character of the mysterious rites. These I imparted to Lady Asenath, who plied me so shrewdly and earnestly with questions, that she seemed to have summoned me to the bar of a judicial inquisition in order to take revenge for a certain tribunal in which our positions had been reversed.

I described the form of the Nanga, how it was an oblong enclosure of upright stones, similar to the "alignments" which have long puzzled antiquaries in Devonshire and Carnac, with altar-like partitions of rude masonry dividing the space into three unequal parts; how the word Nanga was the local equivalent for *longa*, bed, the enclosure being the "Bed of the Ancestors," whose graves dotted the rising ground at the higher extremity of the place; how at certain seasons the initiated repaired to this open-air temple to commune with the spirits

of their forefathers, who could be won by sacrifice to make them proof against an enemy's spear, and to give them an abundant harvest; how the cult was neither universal nor tribal. Rather its members formed a secret society, to which none but those initiated might belong, so that an open enemy might join in the celebration unmolested, though his life would not be worth a moment's purchase if he were encountered going or returning. I told her that, according to the ancient tradition, the cult of the Nanga is the earliest record of missionary enterprise in the Pacific; that long ago two little dark-skinned old men were cast up by the sea at Vitongo on the northern limit of Nandi Bay. By the law of custom the lives of castaways are forfeit; but these little men asserted that they were come upon a holy mission, to teach a cult that should bring the Fijians into closer communion with those that had travelled "the Long Road." Thereupon he that was called Veisina plucked turmeric, and smeared his face and torso with its red powder, while he that was called Rukuruku dyed himself black with candle-nut, and the two marked out the Nanga, and chose followers, and taught them each the mysteries of his cult. I told her—and at this I remember her eyes brightened—that the prayers for fertility were not confined to the fruits of the earth, but included

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the increase of all created things, crops, animals, the tribe itself, and that the fog hung densest over this chapter of the rites. It seemed hopeless to discover these secrets, because the followers of Rukuruku and Veisina might not reveal, even to each other, what passed at their respective celebrations, lest the ancestors should visit the impious and unfaithful with madness or death.

It was useless, I told her, to harass me with questions. I did not know whether or not the women had any part in the rites, nor what was said or done under the shadow of the great trees that hedged the Nanga; but I had heard of one in which the relics of the last celebration lay thick upon the ground, and if she cared to pursue her inquiries upon the spot, I should be glad to take advantage of her unrivalled knowledge of her people. But, from words she let fall, I gathered that my invitation did not tempt her; for that she had already evolved an empirical scheme of ritual based upon a very intimate knowledge of the national character.

When I put in at Navula on the appointed day I did not dream of expecting her. Lord Ezra, a young aristocrat of Bau, whose enlightenment had won him the post of native magistrate on this benighted coast, was waiting by appointment at the landing-place. The Buli, Ezra told me, would

make a brave show of contempt for his people's superstition ; but at heart he disliked the business, for heathen gods, though of course non-existent, had a deplorable habit of punishing desecration. "The ladies," he was going on to say, but at this moment the Buli, worthy man, intervened to enroll himself in the ranks of the enlightened. A furtive back-glance in his eye belied the devil-may-care, who's-afraid sort of swagger in his gait. Would I see the place at once ? he asked. It was close at hand. And the ladies were impatient for my coming. What ladies ? Why, the ladies from Nandi !

It was even so. Mats were spread under the shade of a *tavola* tree in the middle of the village square, and on those mats, accepting the clumsy homage of the village ancients, sat Lady Asenath among her girls, cracking jokes over which her hosts, though they did not understand them, chuckled respectfully. She was always at home, was the Lady Asenath ; as well grounded and as deeply versed in the frigid courtliness of Bau as in the unpolished directness of the country store-keeper and the loutish stolidity of her social inferiors ; and with all sorts and conditions her popularity was the same. My appearance changed the mood of levity upon which she had been condescending ; and her greeting was all that the

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severest propriety could demand from a native lady of rank in her welcome of a Government officer. Not one of all that clownish crowd could have affirmed that we had ever met before ; yet she found time to whisper to me with a roguish twinkle in her eye—"We women *did* use the Nanga, as I told you from the first." I could not ask her then what more she had discovered, for the Buli had so used his authority as to overcome the diffidence of our guides, each of whom was trying to push the others to the front.

Years of neglect had obliterated the trodden road that once led to the holy place, and we had to cut our way through brushwood and festoons of vines. The villagers made a brave show of accompanying us, but as we drew near they began to fall away, until, when we halted on the skirt of an open glade, our company was reduced to three, one guide, the village teacher, and one other.

There stood the Nanga, a parallelogram of moss-grown stones set up on end, fifty yards long, and partitioned near its upper end by two square altars, with a gangway between. Beyond was rising ground, on which I could see two walled graves, built like Nangas in miniature. Grass grew rank in the enclosure, saplings were forcing the stones apart till they slanted in and out like an old man's teeth. Strange-shaped cooking-pots, phallic pip-

kins, in fact, covered with lichen, were strown about the entrance, and right in the doorway a carven staff of ironwood, much weather-worn, stood deep in the soil, as if to bar the way. It was such a staff as old chiefs carry in the west, and plant at the door of a house to signify that they are within ; and in its top was sunk a hole, which gave forth a shrill whistle when you blew at it as at the barrel of a key. The Buli indicated in dumb show how the priest headed the procession, grasping the staff in both hands, and blowing mysterious music from the pipe. "These fools say," he added, "that the man who draws forth that staff will be struck with madness or death."

"The fool!" said Lady Asenath in an undertone. "He pretends to despise them, and yet if *we* were to pull out the staff, he would be off, and the teacher after him."

We did not then put the matter to the touch, but filed into the enclosure through a gap in the stone wall. Here the Buli was moved to give us a disquisition upon the ruins, while, like members of the British Association on the excursion day of the Annual Meeting, we interrupted the flow of his discourse with irrelevant questions. He said that the Order of the Nanga was divided into three castes—the Véré, or priests, who were all old men ; the Vunilolo, who were the full-grown

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warriors; and the Vilavou—the yet uninitiated youths. Two days before the ceremony invitations were sent to favoured visitors, called the Ndre; and while the Vunilolo built cooking ovens near the Nanga, the Ndre came secretly to the spot, and lay in ambush at the roadside. On the morning of the great day, all being prepared, the chief of the Véré took the sacred staff in hand, and sounded the sacred call. Forth from houses streamed the men, caparisoned as for war, with the boys, bowed beneath the weight of gala dresses. The Véré headed the procession; the Vunilolo followed dragging squealing hogs by the hind leg; and last came the Vilavou, each treading exactly in the footmarks of his fore-runner. When they approached the Holy Place, the Ndre sprang from their ambush, and clubbed the hogs, which were straightway cooked and eaten, while the gala dresses were stripped from the boys and piled in the Nanga. There they feasted for three whole days, and thence they returned. But on the fifth day the youths repaired to the Nanga decked in fresh finery. Where are now the ambush and the welcoming shout? The place is hushed and deserted, and the youths halt, uncertain what to do. Suddenly the screams of many parrots pierce the air, and a deep booming sound, like the roar of surf on a reef, chills their

blood. Trembling they advance to the Nanga gate, and here a horrid sight meets their gaze. The outer enclosure is strewn with corpses staring stark into the sky, blood-smeared, hideous with protruding entrails, and beyond the old priest sits and glares at them. A voice calls to them to advance; quaking, they step over the dead Vunilolo, while the old priest demands in a terrible voice why they have slain these goodly warriors. Another elder treads an awful weird dance before them; the surf-boom roars in their ears the while; and now the priest gives forth a horrible yell, the dead men start up, shaking off the pigs' entrails which they had wreathed about them, and dash forth towards the stream to wash themselves clean. The youths are stripped of their fine raiment, and are seated so as to face the inner enclosure, the *Nanga-tabutabu*, the Holy of Holies. The old priest's sternness is relaxed, and he becomes a very lively elder indeed. Dancing to and fro before them, he shouts, "Ué, a-ué, āo evei? Where are the people of my longa? Are they flown to Tongalevu? Are they fled to the deep ocean?" And a deep-toned chant is heard in response. The dead men, sprung to life, decorated with streamers and glistening from their bath, march in with stately steps, and, taking food from the Véré, press it to the youths' lips, who must

not touch it with their fingers. And the old priest beseeches the Ancestors to receive the boys, whom he adjures solemnly, if they would avoid being stricken with madness or death, to keep all that they have seen and heard locked fast in their own breasts. They are now full members of the Order, and free to spend the night in feasting. "There, sir," concluded the Buli, as he pointed to the space beyond the altars, "is the *Nanga-tabutabu*, where the Véré sit, and here the *Loma-ni-nanga*, where the dead men lie ; and there among the trees sit the men who blow into bamboos immersed in water to imitate the booming of the surf."

Lady Asenath appeared deeply disappointed. "That is not all," she said. "What of the women? Are they forbidden the Nanga?"

"Madam," replied the Buli, not a little disconcerted, "the ladies attend the Nanga on the following day, to take part in the feasting. More than this I do not know."

"But Paula does," said Asenath, turning to the teacher. Neither did Paula know anything. The guide laughed quietly to himself.

"Where were the little mounds of earth?" persisted Asenath, who had not pumped the village crones for nothing.

The guide pointed to some half-obliterated inequalities in the ground on which we stood, and

laughed aloud. No entreaties would induce him to put his thoughts into speech. "He was a Vilavou," explained the Buli. "If he were to tell you more, he fears he would be stricken, as the Véré warned him long ago."

"Could he not at least commit some of the songs to writing?" I interposed. "That would not be telling." But the guide shook his head. He could not write, nor, it appeared, could any who had taken part in the last festival of the Order. The guide, moreover, showed a disposition to wander out of earshot of Lady Asenath's questions, and our exploration of the ruins was but half complete. The monstrous hog, dedicated to the Ancestors, could not be seen, having been shot by an irreverent half-caste the year before. But on the graves we found the remains of two ancient flint-lock muskets, the stocks a fibrous pulp, the barrels a hollow cake of rust-flakes. Women had been the price of these terrible engines of war—these "foreign fiends," terrible to friends as to enemies. One indeed had slain the chief that wielded it, being persuaded to that end by the potency of certain foe-borne charms, to burst unexpectedly at the hinder end, shattering his hand with a wound of which he died—this, though he had filled it to the muzzle with gunpowder and pebbles! So they had carried both the fiends

to the Nanga, and laid them on the grave of a dead Vêrë, whose son the stricken man was, and there a more potent charm than any the cunningest enemy could devise had taken the devil out of them. Of the fantastic earthen pots we might take as many as we would. One still held the husks of the candle-nuts with which the Vunilolo had blackened their faces. There remained the graven staff, set by dead hands to guard the entrance year by year, till the tough ironwood rotted into pulp. Valuable relic as it was, I was loth to take it, even to give it a new lease of life in a museum. Of the other part, there was the sacrilegious hand of the half-caste who had shot the sacred hog to glut his appetite, and would use the staff to mend his fire if he chanced to pass that way. So I asked the Buli how the people would take it if we carried the thing to Suva with us.

"If it be your pleasure, sir," said this time-server, "it will be theirs also."

The teacher, appealed to as one more intimately acquainted with local feeling, replied evasively—"Are they not now all Christians?"

The guide, who, as a native of the place, could speak with authority, said grimly that if any one liked to take the risk of madness or death, that was his affair, and none of theirs. Then the Buli

besought me to do nothing rash, lest anything should happen to me, and he be blamed; the teacher grinned uneasily, and thought that, if any one did the deed, it should be the European missionary, with a preliminary service of prayer; and the guide said nothing, but edged away towards the path he had cut through the undergrowth.

Meanwhile Lady Asenath, bored by the discussion, was inspecting the dreadful engine with Maraia and the Pussy-cat, who, urged thereto by her mock tyranny, were patting it delicately with little screams of alarm. Suddenly they shrieked in earnest. Seized by some strange impulse, their mistress pushed them roughly aside, took hold of her fate with both hands, and crying—"Who fears the anger of the gods?" wrenched the staff from its socket in the ground. Then, setting her lips to the whistle, and mimicking the solemn tread of the *Véré*, she advanced towards us, and put the thing, slimy with its coat of green moss, into my hands, saying—"Take it; you are not afraid of it." I looked for the Buli and the guide—they had vanished. For the teacher, his white shirt was just visible through the foliage. Ezra, grave and startled, the two whimpering girls, and I had stayed to see this amazing indiscretion out. "Why, what are you staring at?" cried Asenath with laboured

cheeriness. "Have I leprosy or vindikoso that you gape upon me?"

"Nay, you are young and beautiful as the morning," I replied, with the mock gallantry which never failed to provoke her. "Tell your girls to shoulder those pots, and let us be going."

When they were out of earshot Ezra voiced my thoughts. "It is not that I fear the curse," he said, "for that, we know, is foolishness. But we Fijians, sir, are not as you foreigners. When we are in health we fear nothing, but as soon as sickness befalls us, we turn about to seek a cause. Some day this lady will fall sick, her girls will remind her of this folly, the little seed will spring to a great tree, overshadowing all her mind, and she will straightway abandon hope. I have seen many die thus, and our people say it was the curse." (As indeed it was.) I assured him that Lady Asenath was made of stronger stuff, and lived too strenuously in the present to fret about the past. But he only shook his head.

On the outskirts of the village we found the ladies waiting for us with the Buli and the teacher, who protested, with unnecessary reiteration, that they had hurried on to reassure the people, lest they should hear a garbled version of our deed of sacrilege from the guide.

"They are beside themselves," said Lady

Asenath. "The houses are packed like a fish fence."

The village certainly wore a strange aspect. But for two hogs flicking the flies from their lean flanks there was no living creature to be seen. Expecting to be beset by the entire population, we found ourselves alone in the *rara*. But as I led the way, carrying the staff at the trail, I saw in the doorways a wall of dark faces, merging into eyes without faces in the dusk of the background. It was the same with every house; and, for the benefit of those who have not experienced the sensation, let me say that there is no more difficult feat than to appear at ease under the silent gaze of hundreds of eyes, when you have no key to the emotions in the brains behind. As soon as the staff was safely lodged in my boat, the villagers began to venture forth, and I took the opportunity to ask the elders whether they objected to the removal of the relics left in the Nanga. They assured me that *they* did not mind if *I* did not; and they seemed to gaze at me with the sort of interest which is said to follow the occupant of the condemned cell.

Ezra, meanwhile, had been busy with the son of the last Véré, a genial person of middle age, who had himself taken part in the last celebrations. His reserve seemed to be melting away

under the delicate flattery implied in the condescension of so exalted a personage. Yet there came a point at which Ezra's advances were stopped as by a dead wall. The Vêrë did not know. He knew once, but had forgotten. He remembered, but did not dare to tell. If he told, his liver would swell, or he would become a gibbering idiot like Vokisi in the next village. Certainly he might write it down, if he had ever learned to use the pen. But his writing would be like the trail of a fly that has fallen into the ink-pot, and he could not dictate, for that would be telling.

"Would it be telling to say it standing alone on a rock far out at sea?" I inquired. No, not if there were none to hear. Or to say it into a tin box in an empty house with no man near? No, that would not be telling in the meaning of the curse, though it would be foolishness. Would he do this to oblige me? Perhaps he would.

Now, there was no phonograph in the islands; but there were telephones, and the notion of thus stealing a transcript of the songs chanted in these mystic rites attracted me. It attracted Ezra even more, and the indifference of Lady Asenath, who seemed confident of gaining her end by other means, piqued me to a trial of ingenuity. She, according to her wont, had surrounded herself with

a group of admiring crones, who hung upon her lips, shaking their fingers and nudging each other in pure enjoyment of her sallies. When I broke up this pleasant party, by declaring that the boat could not be delayed, I fancied that I overheard something about an assignation for the morrow. My suspicion was strengthened by the lady's sudden loss of interest in our researches. Even when I rallied her upon her curiosity as to her sex's part in the mysterious rites, she was ostentatiously indifferent; saying vaguely, that women had other things to do than share in such tomfoolery; a remark which seemed to tickle the Pussy-cat to the verge of ill-breeding. I was, therefore, prepared for the message, brought me at Serua, where we passed the night, that Lady Asenath desired me not to be angry; but, seized with sudden illness in the night, she found it quite impossible to accompany me. She would rest a day or two, and then borrow a canoe and fare westward to her own home. I trust that my face wore a proper expression of concern, when I offered to send a doctor to her aid from Navua, our next halting-place up the coast; but the suppressed laughter in the ladies' quarters, two doors off, whither Maraia was conveying my condolences, led me to doubt it at the time. Lady Asenath was too ill to receive me before we left; yet, as

we were embarking, I had indubitable proof that at least two bowls of kava were leading features in the treatment prescribed for her indisposition.

Official business did not detain me long in Suva. From the stores of the Commissioner of Works I drew a telephone and eighty yards of insulated wire, and from a shop on the beach, in which the latest native fashions in sulus were studied, I provided myself with gifts so sumptuous that the terrors of the deadliest curse must dwindle and droop into insignificance beside them. With a fair wind we reached Navula the same evening, and made shift to pass the night in the headman's squalid little house. The villagers tasted luxury that night. Tea thickened with sugar until a spoon would almost stand in it; tins of meat, prized open and flung recklessly to the meanest—even to the women; tobacco in thick twists; kava ripened and dried in far Samoa; and not a word about the Nanga to embarrass the most sensitive! We seemed, indeed, to have forgotten the Nanga altogether, until, somewhere about the eighth bowl, when tongues were wagging loose, some surfeited elder cried—“*Veka!* Why did not the ladies stay for this?”

“Ladies!” said Ezra in limped innocence; “what ladies?” It then appeared that this feast was but the climax to a crimson week. The

ladies—they said it with reluctance, having, as it afterwards appeared, been sworn to secrecy—had been with them again. They had, in fact, returned on the very morning of Lady Asenath's indisposition, being, so they said, sent back because I was too ill to convey them farther than Serua. And having put in for the one bare night, they had stayed three, and were at that very moment scarce four hours on their homeward journey. They too had brought gifts with them from Serua—a pig, and more yams than could be counted. Ah! she *was* a lady—quite unlike other ladies. (I did not dissent.) There was no supercilious arrogance about *her*. She was courteous to everybody, and entered into their ways just like one of themselves. And she told stories (they were right); and at the memory of her stories they clapped hand to mouth, and chuckled. “Our women wept, as if it had been a funeral, sir, when she went,” the headman assured me.

“How did you pass the evenings?” I asked, a quick suspicion flashing through my mind.

“We drank kava, sir, and smoked, and the lady told stories——”

“What are those?” I asked, pointing to faded garlands hanging from the necks of two youths among the crowd. The elders hung their heads, and picked at the flooring grass.

"There was a little dancing, sir, for the entertainment of the ladies."

They were only just such ordinary dances as are danced at any *solevu*: just the common, mean, stupid dances you see at missionary school-feasts. Just dances, quite unworthy my attention.

Now there are, as everybody knows, dances and dances: from the formal quadrille at a Court Ball to the classic orgies of the Bacchanalia; from the amative tedium of a Brixton hop to the professional exhibitions at the Moulin Rouge. But I could hazard a conjecture towards which extreme a dance performed in Lady Asenath's honour was likely to incline. In the eye of the law the natives are free to dance as they please, provided they are prepared to face the disfavour of the missionaries, who have been taught by experience that a great number of harmless and picturesque practices are associated with recollections of the unregenerate past. Dancing, moreover, tends to a deplorable love of frolic in the young, at the age when they should be cultivating the serious turn of mind which is essential to spiritual well-being and a knowledge of the Catechism. The Government did not go so far as this; but there were limits even to its complacency. Dancing was lawful so long as it was unconnected with practices that involved a breach of the law, when it became punishable with stripes. The pro-

scribed practices were witchcraft (*ndraunikau*) and the cult of the Water-Sprite (*Luveniivai*): the former, because, a spell being cast upon a man (and there were always well-wishing friends to tell him of it), he refused his food and died of fright; the latter, because of late years the cult had degenerated into a thieves' sabbath, in which the riotous blackguards of the tribe met to plan robberies and share the swag. These mock rites were invariably celebrated with uproarious choregraphy, accompanied with such scraps of the old ritual as the youths had picked up from their elders. The confusion of my entertainers showed that the dances which had diverted Lady Asenath partook of this forbidden character, in other words, that the natives saw a strong analogy between the mysteries of the Nanga and the cult of the Water-Sprite.

But they found me toleration itself. If I might not see the dances, at least I might hear the words of the songs? Or if, as they now admitted, the Curse forbade them to divulge the songs, how was it that the ladies of Nandi, strangers like myself, had been permitted to hear them? This set them whispering among themselves, and Ezra, who was listening attentively, leaned towards me and murmured—"I gather, sir, from what they are saying, that they consider Lady Asenath an initiate."

THE GREAT NANGA SCANDAL

“How? Lady Asenath initiated? Impossible!” He nodded, and set himself to make one last appeal.

“Look you,” he said to the headman with a condescending smile; “the matter stands thus: Uluivothe there” (he indicated the son of the dead Véré) “would repeat these old *mbaki* songs to us if he dared. For surely he would not refuse to us what he has accorded to the ladies of Nandi? But he dares not, for fear of the anger of the Ancestors. Now there are two roads open by which our wishes may be gratified and the will of your Ancestors respected. One is for Uluivothe to initiate us. But this road is difficult, since one of us is a foreigner. The other is for Uluivothe to sing the songs and tell the mysteries to an empty canister in an empty house, with no man within hearing. This is folly no doubt, but are not many of the things which foreigners desire us to do equally foolish? Were not we made to count our pigs and fowls, and write the sum of them in a book? Had not we to submit our arms to be pricked by the doctors? Were not the elders made to put away all wives but one, and the young men to bridge the streams and widen the roads when fords and footpaths sufficed our fathers? To talk into the ear of a canister is empty folly; but it is not greater foolishness than all these, and since such things please foreigners, why refuse to do them?”

The elders grunted assent. "Very well, then. Where is an empty house?"

Uluivothe's own, it seemed, stood a little back from the rest. The elders began to enter with zest into the novelty of the experiment. Ezra picked up the transmitter of the telephone, cunningly embedded in an empty biscuit tin. "Here, then," he continued, "is the canister. It held biscuits as you see. I shall tie it to the wall of the house by a string, lest Uluivothe run off with it." (The theft of an empty biscuit-tin proved a side-splitting conceit.) "Uluivothe will put his lips to it, and repeat the verses he learned from his father, and he may post his friends round the house to see that no one plays the eavesdropper." In a peal of laughter the hereditary arch-priest of the Nanga blushing consented.

We were conducted to the house; and I waited outside, while Ezra poked the end of the wire through the thatched walls from within, and tied it to a beam. Then I paid out the slack till I reached our quarters, and passed the free end through the wall at the back of my mosquito net. I said good-night to my host, and turned in, with the telephone ready to my ear, and a notebook to my hand, while Ezra went to wind up the arch-priest, Uluivothe. He told me afterwards that the entire population of the village surrounded the

house, and seconded his efforts with derisive encouragement.

For a long time nothing happened. Then the telephone rattled harshly. The arch-priest was clearing his voice, and laughing mirthlessly. The membrane now began to drone with a plaintive note like the voice of a bumble-bee imprisoned in an egg-cup. I caught a few words, perhaps a dozen, when it broke into another rattle, ending in a hiss. The absurdity of talking to a biscuit-tin had been too much for Uluivothe, and not to please the Governor of the colony himself would he brave the ridicule of his fellow-villagers. He would never hear the last of his folly, as it was. So Ezra had the wire coiled away, and came to tell me that what we did not know about the Nanga was better left unknown, and the sequel proved him to be right.

During the next few weeks my ardour in Nanga-hunting was cooled by the chilling routine of duty. For all I knew, Nandi was slumbering in the haze that wrapped the lowlands like a veil throughout the breathless summer days, when men are too lazy even to carry slanders of their neighbours. The rare visitors to the camp came almost empty-handed, and in all those weeks there was not a rent to be darned in the character of any absent friend. A cynic might ascribe this to the thunder-

storms, which gathered in the mountains every afternoon, and rolled ponderously down upon the plains in sheets of rain till cock-crow. But with the return of the cool trade winds came fine moonlit nights, and scandal once more took the road. It drifted in from every quarter of the compass with every sort of wayside poison, from the open whisper of disaffection to the sly innuendo of a slip from the path of virtue. And among the first tale-bearers came one from Nandi, with a shallow pretence of begging tobacco, which covered a tale so monstrous that it seemed to be bursting from the pores of his tightened skin. He scarce waited till we were decently alone ere he began—"I bring grievous intelligence, sir, from down below."

He was a thin, anxious-looking man, with a habit of sucking in his breath between his sentences, and I knew him as one who revelled in grievous intelligence, for he had been a mission teacher before his fall, and arrogated even now many privileges of the cloth. "Men will stare aghast, when it is known ; the blood will flow down into their lower limbs, and none dares tell the teacher." I knew this kind of preface well, and said so.

"Nay, sir," he protested. "This is pure truth, and I, being the first to hear it, thought it well to carry it to you. Nandi is black with paganism. The land will stink."

“Witchcraft as usual, I suppose?”

“Nay, sir, witchcraft is nothing, injuring but the body, but this which I have to tell will ruin a hundred souls. Not one of our chiefs will escape. Have you ever heard, sir, of a place called the Nanga?”

It was useless to pretend indifference now; he had seen me start, and he sucked in his breath with a smack of satisfaction. I admitted that I had heard of such things in the eastern provinces.

“Then you did not know, sir, that there was a Nanga in Nandi? Nor did I until I saw it with my own eyes yesternight! It lies in a grove of great ivi trees on the river-bank midway between Narewa and Momi. Long ago our fathers practised strange rites there, they say, but surely none stranger than will be seen there to-morrow.”

“What do you mean?” I asked sharply.

He turned and craned his neck beyond the doorway to assure himself that there were no eavesdroppers. He knew something of the native regulation respecting tale-bearers and slanderers.

“Last night, sir, I took the air in the bush beyond the village. As I went, I thought I heard the beat of a dancing drum afar off. And when I drew nearer to it, I heard such singing as is never heard in these days. If I had not been a church-goer, sir, I should have taken the singers for spirits

and fled in terror. But I reflected that gods have no need of torches, and I knew that here must be some wickedness. And then I saw a sight that broke all my bones, and set my limbs trembling, so that I sank helpless on the ground. The chiefs; sir, those that are in authority over us, and the ladies——” He was becoming incoherent.

“Go on,” I said sternly, “what chiefs?”

He did not like to commit himself to names. “All the chiefs, sir. They were practising a dance, sir, a devil-dance, and when I heard it I covered my face for very shame.”

“And ran away out of earshot?”

“No, sir, I stayed. And presently one of the men left the others, and came over towards me where I lay behind a tree. I thought he would not see me, but he did. And I, knowing the man well, asked him what they were doing. At first he was confused, but presently he asked me to be of their company, and keep their secret, for there were to be great doings in the Nanga to-morrow. And so, the better to inform you, I promised and went with him.” -

“Tell me one thing,” I said with beating heart. “Was the Lady Asenath among them?”

“Sir, I will not lie to you. She it was who was teaching them the songs. I blush to say it of so great a lady.”

I blushed to hear it, for I knew the rest. Spurred by my foolish challenge, she had pumped those simple Nanga folk dry, and was organizing a sort of Nanga tournament on her own account. It was just the kind of entertainment that would appeal to her. At all hazards it had to be stopped, if Lady Asenath, for the first time in her life (so far as I knew), was to be held from a breach of the criminal law.

Plainly I was not the person to interfere. Some garbled version of our joint antiquarian researches on the Serua coast must by this time have been known in every village in the bay. Lady Asenath's pupils were probably quoting me as the patron of their unhallowed sports. If I were now to go and remonstrate with them in the precincts of the Nanga itself, the purest motives in the world could not save me from the calumny of sanctioning these mock rites by my presence. No ; for this extremity there must be found an agent, a man of influence, who could be trusted to handle the matter with delicacy, and hold his tongue about it afterwards. Given such a man, the scandal might be confined within the limits of the bay, and the fair fame of Nandi be left comparatively unsmirched ; or, if it had gone too far for that, at least I might be excused from taking official action against the law-breakers on the score of my supposed ignorance of

a deplorable affair. If the Bishop had been at home I should have been in no anxiety, but some annual meeting had called him out of the diocese, and of all his clergy not one had weight enough or tact enough for the enterprise, nor discretion enough to keep him from blabbing to his European superior. I ran them all over in my mind, and was startled to find that I had not looked nearer home. One there was who had the tact and the weight (in divers senses), one whose dual allegiance to both the spiritual and the temporal powers made him independent of both, a native he of Lady Ascnath's own village,—in brief, the very man if he could be stirred to action—our stout army chaplain, Michael.

While the informer's mouth was busy taking in supplies I summoned Michael from his pretty little house beyond the south gate of the camp. The slothful ease and good-nature in his countenance as he waddled in pleaded for him against the strain, both physical and moral, that I was going to lay upon him. But I was pitiless, and as I unfolded the strange story black fear made him its prey. His eyes grew rounder, his mouth fell open and stayed so, and his eyebrows reached for his hair. Once he tried to wring his hands—he might as well have tried to wring a pair of boxing gloves; and when he heard that he

was the chosen instrument, he began to sweat profusely.

"Michael," I concluded, "I have chosen you because I know you to be a discreet man, who will keep this matter a secret. I do not ask you to go, because I see you are straining at the cable to set sail and rescue these poor, deluded fellow-townsmen." The cable did not seem to be in any danger of snapping. On the contrary, he showed no enthusiasm, if he made no resistance; like the men to whom the honour of building empires really belongs, he did what he was told without seeking to have his exploit chronicled in history—which was just as well for him. In less than an hour the informer met him at the gate, and I watched the two top the ridge on the road to Nandi, looking against the sky-line like a broomstick travelling with a sack of oats. We will follow them.

When Michael set foot upon his native plains he was not in a fit state to take part even in a pagan ceremony. His starched shirt clung to his skin like a bathing dress, and he got his breath in labouring gasps. But his guide, having reason to believe that they would miss the opening of the entertainment, knew not compassion. They avoided the villages, making straight for the unfrequented tract that lies on the frontier of Momi. At last they climbed a barren hillock of bare red earth, so

heated by the sun that it scorched their feet, whence they could see every acre that separated them from the sea. The guide, in high excitement, pointed towards a grove of old ivi trees, their sombre foliage streaked with white smoke-wreaths, on the bank of the stream below.

"Look!" he said, gripping his companion by the arm, "the Nanga! They have begun to cook the feast. Let us run, or we shall be too late."

"My friend," said Michael, "if I run I shall die. Run if you wish. But as for me, I shall sit down here and think." And so, when they plunged at last into the gloom of the grove, and the little speckled mosquitoes that haunt the ivis settled on poor Michael in countless multitudes, the sound of a dancing drum announced that they had missed the rising of the curtain. What they saw was enough. The gnarled trunks, the dark foliage of the ivis made pillared and vaulted aisles, in which a solemn cathedral gloom and a chill damp oppressed the spirit. The branches, closing overhead like an arch, shut out every ray of sunshine. The evil genius of old-time pagan rites seemed to haunt the spot. In the grove was the ruin of a Nanga, bearing the marks of recent restoration. The two spectators crawled as near as they dared, and then dissembled themselves among the plank-like roots of the largest ivi. Sitting a few yards off with their

backs to them were ten young scapegraces thumping hollow bamboos upon the earth, screeching parrot-calls, and imitating the roaring of the surf by sounding bamboo trumpets immersed in bowls of water ; and in the drummer and leader of this discordant band Michael recognized with pain his own sister's son. The hungry wayfarers were also vexed to observe that they were too late for the opening of the ovens, the ground near the entrance of the Nanga being strewn with scorched leaf-wrappings, yam-parings, and hot stones still reeking with gravy and fat. The musicians too, despite the heathenish black paint with which their faces and bodies were bedaubed, wore something of the peace-with-all-the-world aspect of men who have feasted well. But the two spies were not left to yearn long for vanished joys. The enclosure itself, its innermost and holiest recess, awoke to sudden activity. Two aged but unvenerable persons, stark naked but for the black pigment that besmeared their shrunken limbs, and the vast brown turbans that threatened to extinguish them, sprang to their feet and capered up and down, piping strange invocations to the sombre shadows of the grove. The drum quickened its beat to a weird tattoo that set the pulses tingling. And, as if in answer, a choir of female voices was heard chanting afar off. The antics of the old

reprobates in the Nanga grew in violence and unseemliness, the wood echoed to their screams ; they were men no longer, but rather the spirits of dead priests to whose unhallowed rites this spot had been tabu long ago. Louder grew the chant ; from empty sound it took shape in words—in words that sent shivers down poor Michael's ample back ! And then, to crown the shame, he saw Lady Asenath herself, apparelled as usual, with no excuse of gala dress, leaning against a tree, beaming with pride and good-nature, in which there was mingled just such a maternal and calculating expression as she wore in church when her eye would rove from the youths' side to the maidens'. A child could have guessed her part in this disgraceful drama : she was behind the scenes as author, prompter, and stage-manager in one. Aye, and what a piece was hers. Forth from the trees came the head of the procession. They were the flower of Nandi's girlhood, from the chit of fifteen to the perennial young person who had ceased to count her seasons ; and they all had their hair dyed scarlet ; and they wore an arrangement in thatch which began too late and ended too early. If the dress *had* to be a series of fibre fringes nine inches wide, beginning at the waist, it was mere pedantry in Lady Asenath to copy the old ritual to the extent of carrying the structure upwards instead of in the down direction.

And now the two ancients changed their screams to a rhythmic chant of "*Lovo ulu!* Duck your heads," and down the damsels flopped on hands and knees, to crawl into the enclosure. Chanting their profane song they shuffled through the outer halls till they reached the further recess. There the old men held aloft a bowl of water, and poured it on the ground, praying to the Ancestors to bless the girls with ample families. When the bevy formed procession to crawl out again Michael noticed little hillocks of fresh-turned earth encumbering the middle section of the Nanga. He closed his eyes, he says, when he realized that the procession was taking a sinuous course in order to climb and top these obstructions on all fours. And scarce had the last of the girls reached the entrance to the enclosure, when, with a savage yell, a band of armed and painted warriors burst from the trees and dashed towards them. The drum-beats caught a dance rhythm that set even Michael's portly limbs a-twitch to be at it; the girls, screaming mock abuse in most unseemly language, flung themselves into the posture of the dance, and then, though not till then, was Michael's spirit moved to active interference.

There has always been a mystery about what followed. Being pressed upon the point, Michael gave a short hacking laugh, and said that he would

write it down and send it to me ; but when I broke the seal of his missive I found that it contained nothing but a transcript of two of the songs he overheard. (These, being unfit for any eye but that of science, will be preserved in MS. by a leading authority in anthropological research.) It was from Michael's cowardly companion that I learned some part of the truth: how Michael waddled boldly into the Nanga with uplifted arm, crying—"What! are you church-goers?" How the men, aghast at his intrusion, fell back, and the girls cowered together in amaze. How then Lady Asenath, recognizing her old comrade, laughed with glee and shouted—"Veka! Michael is for dancing. Strike up, drums!" and caught him by the arm, while the girls, forgetful of his cloth, and mindful only of their old butt and playmate, closed in upon him, whipped the shirt in shreds from off his back, and danced madly about him, whirling him hither and thither, until in his uncouth struggles he must (to a spectator unacquainted with his solid character) have seemed to have yielded to the intoxication of this Venusberg, to have joined in the revels of Klingsor's enchanted garden. How he sank panting to the ground at last, inarticulate with rage and horror, and the laughter of the men went up to heaven in one overwhelming roar. And how Lady Asenath,

recalled to sober sense by pity for his plight, scattered the girls with angry ejaculations, and strove with him for forgiveness till he gave in, pleading the dull monotony of life to which civilization condemned the young as her excuse for trying to enliven it with a little old-time carnival such as their forefathers, who understood these things better than the foreigners, had devised as a wholesome tonic for life-weariness. How, when the dancers returned, washed clean of heathenish paint, and clad as Christians, they plied him with dainties from their feast, and bowed their heads to his pastoral admonition, only imploring him never to reveal their foolish escapade. And how, at last, he said a prayer in which they all joined,—even the old Véré, Palm-water, who had disgraced himself more than all, being quite old enough to know better,—and put forth iconoclastic hands against the Nanga itself, which they wrecked until the keenest antiquarian eyes could never discern its nature.

And now, if any dare to reproach the Lady Asenath with a certain lightness, they find her stoutest champion in Chaplain Michael, who defends her character with a vehemence astounding in one who has never been roused to commit himself to an opinion even in the most burning controversy. In this he deliberately braves the censure of his

fellow-clergy, who have always envied him the enjoyment of a monthly stipend from the State. "This Michael," they say, "sits in slothful ease upon his mat, and lets the soldiers work their wicked will unrebuked, and when we, who are no respecters of persons, chide the wickedness of the great ones of the earth, he steps in to defend them." What would they say if they knew of Klingsor's garden?

There is no hope of ecclesiastical preferment for Michael, nor does he pine for it. "Live and let live" is his motto, and so long as his stipend is unmenaced, and Litiana, his wife, finds an outlet for her chronic ill-humour abroad, life can have nothing more to give him.

Yet, despite Michael's marvellous discretion, the scandal of the Nanga leaked out, as such things will. A fellow whispered the shocking story to me in Ba; I heard a garbled version of it in Bau, and even in Suva there were rumours of a recrudescence of gross heathenism in the west. Once only did I convey to Lady Asenath a sly hint of my guilty knowledge of her guilt. "Speaking of illness," I said, "do you remember how ill you were at Serua? You were interested in the Nanga at the time, but since that illness you have so lost interest that the existence of a Nanga in Nandi itself is unknown to you."

She searched my soul a moment with the whimsical look I knew so well. "My friend," she said at last, "have you ever seen them fish for shark? They bait a sharp hook with a piece of pork, and the shark looks at it with his little blue eye. Then he sends his pilot fish to taste it, but the pilot fish is pricked by the hook, and flies weeping to his master. Then Sir Shark leaves the pork alone. He is a wise fish, my friend." So I left the pork alone. But I could not help remarking that if she intended the trim, dapper little pilot fish as a figure for Chaplain Michael, her analogy was singularly faulty.

XII

THE PASSING OF ASENATH

CAPRICIOUS are the ways of Death. Great level-ler of unequal estates the wide world through, it is to the brown folk that he turns when he would sate his sportive humour. From us whites he stands apart, sending his avant-couriers—childbed, sickness, and accident in a thousand shapes—to prepare us for his coming ; but he stands close behind these brown children of an hour, the readier to call them in whenever the humour takes him, smiling at their light-hearted play, tenderly stifling their cry for respite and their startled farewell to their playfellows. The others are scared for a moment, and then the game goes on with unabated zest. Their life is no gloomier for its uncertainty. The thread is spun so slender that no lingering sickness frays it to snapping point ; Death simply touches it while life is in full vigour, and it parts. This is why their mourning has its fixed rules

and seasons, in which real grief has no space to play a part. It comes so easily to every home that there is no time for chafing at its cruelty.

It is ill for a white man to make friends among the brown folk, for then he comes to note the gaps among his welcomers after every little absence, and he will not dare to speak his question for fear of the unvarying reply, "*Sa Mate*"—Dead. Old age there is, of course. Players strut about the stage to the very curtain, but somehow we seem to sit out the parts of all the players we love. A scene or two, a sudden exit, and the piece drags on with lesser players.

Death was in a capricious humour when he called in the Lady Asenath. All around were starveling babies, rickety youths, sapless elders. Navula himself, crippled in mind and body, invited him, but he passed them all by and chose Asenath in the fulness of her health and energy. Suddenly, as she followed her wonted occupations, she was seized with pains in every bone. They sent for a wise woman, who culled leaves from the swamp and chewed them into a cunning medicine, which had been a secret in her family for generations, and was prescribed impartially for every ailment, from a sprained ankle to the measles. The Lady Asenath laughed good-humouredly through her pain, and drank the stuff, but when five minutes

had elapsed, and it had worked no cure, they called in another dame to dose her, and yet another, until the native skill of Narewa was exhausted. In Sambeto there was a masseuse of renown, who knew the inmost springs of human pain to be but malignant spirits, subject to her skill. Her fees were high, but what was that when so precious a life rocked in the balance? It was night when she arrived, and the patient was aflame with fever, and wandering in her talk. The wise woman bade them move Lady Asenath to the open doorway to cool her, and then anointed her body with scented oil, and laid her stripped upon the ground to undergo the operation.

Taking the sufferer's head between her hands she squeezed and kneaded the spirit down into the neck, forced it lower into the shoulders, and, gripping the throat tight with her left hand to prevent it from darting back, squeezed it down the left arm to the wrist, into the fingers even, until with a skilful jerk she dragged it out of the fingers' tips, and flung it sharply into the farthest corner of the house. But other spirits were sulking in the body, and, annoy them as she would, she could not stir them from their lurking-place. She pounded bravely on the abdomen, kneading and pummelling the flesh until it was impossible for any self-respecting spirit to keep his grip. Down

into the right leg she forced them, driving them with almost superhuman expenditure of vigilance and dexterity clear into the ankle, whence she cast a whole handful of them out into the night. But one there was, so it afterwards proved, too cunning even for her. Somehow it eluded her nimble fingers and doubled back into the body, which it tortured the more cruelly for the annoyances it had suffered. So the Lady Asenath grew worse.

Then they bethought them of the Government doctor in Ba, some thirty miles away, and a messenger took the road at once. Twelve hours passed, twelve fateful hours for the sick woman, who lay half-unconscious with fever, drinking mechanically the herb potions put to her lips. At sunset the messenger returned without the doctor, but not alone. He had brought the native medical practitioner Sayasi, lately returned from his studies in the Suva hospital, with a large medicine chest wherewith to impress his less erudite fellow-townsmen. There had been such a run upon Masima Episamu (Epsom Salts) and other popular remedies, and so much havoc done to his dispensary by a fall the box had had in landing from the vessel, that there was little left beside the Sulifuriki Asiti (Sulphuric Acid) and Tinkatura Rosimari (Tincture of Rosemary), but

these the leech had brought with him. He looked very grave over the case, felt the patient's pulse twice, listened at the pit of the stomach with a stethoscope, and put a thermometer in the armpit. Then he told the assembled company that they were all fools and dark-minded, and that he had a mind to lay information against the meddlesome wise women before the magistrate, and he poured out a stiff dose of his Tinkatura, and forced the sick woman to drink it.

"What is the name of her sickness?" inquired a cousin humbly.

"Sickness?" said Sayasi contemptuously, "she has three sicknesses, and all are heavy upon her. You should have sent for me before."

"He is right," they murmured, as he fell upon the food. "How erudite he is!"

For a day longer the sufferer took the remedies of all her medical advisers in deference to the importunities of her friends; but since no one, however ill he be, can subsist on medicines alone, she rebelled at last, and expunged the "Tinkatura" from her diet. By this time she was very ill indeed. Her niece Salome dreamed that her spirit came by night to foretell her dissolution, and of course carried these cheerful tidings to the sick-bed. Men shook their heads and whispered of sending for the minister, hesitatingly, because he

was a person known to lack humour, and to be a *persona ingrata* at Lady Asenath's court. But in the end he came unbidden to tell home-truths to the dying woman, and ease the shock of sudden damnation by imparting a foretaste of the coming torment. In Sunday shirt and Bible, the usual insignia of office, he took his seat by the bedside, in company with a divinity student trained to punctuate his admonitions with groans of contrition.

"Alas, madam," he said, "your sickness is heavy on you. It is the judgment of the Lord. What must your sin have been to merit such a chastisement?"

A gleam of intelligence illumined Asenath's wasted features. "We are all sinners, Timothy; you and I with the rest; and I, being sick unto death, do grieve very heartily for your sins."

The minister blew out his cheeks. "Madam, we are here to pray for you. Even at this late hour repentance may save you from the flames."

"And I, Timothy," replied the weak voice, "at this late hour pray very earnestly that all your iniquities may be pardoned; for I, having done with life, can sin no more, while you, being hot with young blood—what temptations will you not

still yield to? Timothy, my friend, beware of women. Do you remember the little Ana?"

The teacher caught a snuffle from the silent group about the fire and glared at his divinity student.

"Madam," he retorted with heat, "in two days at most you will be squirming in the flames. These pains that you now suffer are but as the nip of a mosquito to the agonies that you will endure throughout Eternity. This sickness is the judgment for some great sin you have lately committed; be therefore subdued in spirit, and tell me frankly what it was."

"Nay rather," murmured the sufferer, "tell me of your sins, Timothy; for I, having been myself a sinner, shall the better give you consolation. Moreover, it has been the way of young men to confide their sins to me these many years."

"In the matter of these heathen practices of the Nanga, madam, you were very blameworthy."

"In the matter of little Ana, Timothy—nay, be not angry—you did that you should be sorry for."

"Dying unrepentant, madam, you will be the text for every sermon preached in Nandi."

"My sins, Timothy, are like the hairs of your head before you grew bald, numberless. To recall

them never pleased me, whereas your sins concern me very nearly. Let us, then, be Papists this once. I the priest, you the sinner; this house the wooden box in which they sit enclosed together. Conceal nothing; say with what words you persuaded her, how she answered you, how cunningly."

"Madam, believing you heathen, I came to save you. If you are Papist, you are damned beyond all saving. Let us go, Melchisedech."

When the grass door-screen had closed behind them, the sick woman fell back upon her mats exhausted, and her household began to dispute what was the real cause of her disorder, softly at first, but hotly enough afterwards to be heard by the sufferer. The older women held that some secret enemy had bewitched her, but this view did not commend itself, seeing that she had no enemies, unless it were the mission teachers of the stamp of him who had just gone forth. Others hinted that he was right, that she had been stricken for her sins; but against this was the undoubted fact that she was past the age for committing the only sin that was much accounted of in the mission code, as they understood it. "If it had been the Pussy-cat, now," said one old crone, "one might have understood it." That damsel, recalled from a

whispered conversation with Ruth by the sound of her own name, said—"Listen, and I will tell you what we think it was." Then she related what had passed at Navula: how the elders had warned them of the fate that awaited any who desecrated the Nanga, and how Lady Asenath with her own hands had plucked the sacred staff from its socket in the earth. They held their breath to listen, interrupting her with sharp exclamations of amazement and horror, and when she had finished, speculated no more, but straightway abandoned hope. They did not know that she was listening, and started when she spoke.

"Are you talking about the staff I plucked out?" she asked sharply. They were silent, looking from one to the other, and raising their eyebrows. "Aye," she went on, "I have pondered much upon that staff, and my heart assures me that the curse is upon me. Furthermore, that I shall die on Thursday night." There was, therefore, nothing left but to make preparations for her burial.

"Is Palm-water here?" she asked after a pause. A message was passed back to those who stood outside the house.

"*Momo*, he is here," cried one presently, and the ranks parted to allow a lean and withered figure to crawl through them on all fours to the front. A

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village ancient was Palm-water, who had posed as the Véré in the scandalous iniquities of the Nanga, with scarce sap left in his rusty joints to crawl to the sunny corner of his plantation, and potter about with a digging stick, while his daughter-in-law tended the vuraïs. Sitting cross-legged in the lamp-light, his dull skin wrapped loosely about his skeleton, rough with wrinkles and sparse grey bristles, he looked like age incarnate. Toothless he was, because in early youth he had had the misfortune, unwittingly, to eat a portion of one of his relations, and the scaliness of his shoulders and the watery redness of his eyes bespoke him a secret tippler at the kava bowl. The mission loved him not, though he treated all its ministers with unvarying politeness, and blandly agreed with them that an old man with one foot already planted in the grave, who never went to church, and quaffed the kava bowl unceasingly, had a place prepared for him in the hottest corner of the fire eternal. He knew as well as they what was his real offence in their eyes—that he was a mine of ancient lore, the last link with dying superstitions of his race; that to him the young men lent their ears whenever the dreariness of virtue became intolerable, and from him the village crones drew inspiration for their tales of heroic deeds done by the warriors of old.

"Thou art well come, Palm-water," said the Lady Asenath. "My time is at hand. The curse of the staff is heavy on me. But two days hence I die, and the teacher promises me eternal flames. Thither go the foreigners, we know, but whether they will take us Fijians thither, as they aver, we know not. For myself I would go to the place whither our fathers went, crossing the Shadow Water to the coast beyond, and, lest indeed that be my destination, I have sent for thee to tell me of it."

"*E Momo*," quavered the old man, "that is a hard road our fathers travelled. Long was the journey, and many were the perils they met by the way. No fire consumed them, yet perhaps the way of the foreigners when they die is the better."

"Who knows?" replied the sick woman. "Tell us how our fathers died, that these youths may hear as well as I. Life is hot within them now, but the day is preparing when they too must go the same road."

The old man sat silent, his wrinkled face cast down in thought. "*E Momo*," he began at last; "when Nambitu, the chief, your grandfather died, his body was washed, and enshrouded in costly mats from Yasawa, and a whale's tooth was laid

upon his breast to be his stone to throw at the Pandanus-tree. And while the women sat about the body wailing, his Shade went and stood upon the banks of the Shadow Water, which we call the Sambeto river, at the place called Lelele, the Ferry, and cried to Themba, the Ferryman, to bring to the bank the end of his canoe which was of hard Vesi, for Nambitu was a chief, and the prow, which is of soft bread-fruit wood, is for the Shades of common men. Thus said our fathers, and I believe that they spoke truly. Having crossed the ferry, the Shade travelled on to the head of the Sambeto stream, where there is a bridge formed of the body of a monstrous eel, on whose back the Shade must tread in trembling caution. This Nambitu crossed in safety, being just and mild in his life, for when the eel feels on his back the feet of the tyrannous or niggardly, he wriggles in displeasure, and they slip down into the dark water, and are seen no more. From the bridge his Shade travelled onward toward the mountain spur that lies towards Sambeto, whereon grows the Pandanus-tree, at which every Shade must cast his stone. If his aim is true, he sits down to await the coming of his wives, who he now knows are being strangled to his Manes, but if he misses his aim he goes on weeping aloud, for he knows

that his wives have been unfaithful to him, and care not to be strangled to accompany him."

"But they strangled only the old widows, not the young," interrupted Asenath.

"Nay, *Momo*, young and old alike if they were faithful."

"Dark-minded fools, to permit so reckless a waste," she retorted.

"Thence," continued Palm-water, "the path of the Shades leads upwards to the great range which spans the world from Nandi to the Sacred Mount, Nakauvandra. And as thy grandfather rose from the plain, he encountered Ghost-Scatterer, Drondroyalo, who strode towards him furiously, and pounded his nape with a great stone, scattering far and wide the ndawa fruit he carried as provisions for the journey. And now the path led him to the lair of the twin goddesses, Nino, the Peerers, who crept upon him, peering sidelong, and gnashing their frightful teeth. These it is given to the Shade to escape, for shrieking in afright, he flees up the path. So, fainting with thirst and terror, Nambitu came upon a spring of pure water gushing from the rock, and as soon as he had tasted it he ceased from weeping, and we, his friends who wept at home, ceased also, for our sorrows too were forgotten, and our grief was

assuaged ; therefore this spring is called the Wai-ni-ndula—the Water of Solace. And when his thirst was quenched, he stood erect from drinking, and looked afar, and lo ! the white buli shells on the roof-tree of the dwellings of the gods on Nakau-vandra were gleaming in the sun, and he cast away the via roots he was carrying, for he knew that he was near his journey's end, and would want no more provision for the way. So he flung away his via by the spring, and to this day you may see the via sprouting where the Shades cast it away.

“*E Momo*, the road was perilous, for what Shade can escape Tatovu's axe? Gashed and bleeding, he limped on to the lurking-place of Motoduruka—Reedspear—who pierced him with his lance. Chief or commoner, he must go down on hands and knees to pass the Crawling-place, and bow ten times at the Bowing-place, for so the gods would have it. Anon he must faint away, and be dragged forward by the heels as corpses are dragged to the ovens. At the Pinching-stone he must pause to nip the stone with all the strength in his fingers, to prove his industry in life, for the nails of a lazy Shade indent the stone, but the industrious make no mark, they having worn away their nails by scooping up the earth

in the yam garden. Then the desire came upon him to laugh and dance, and, jesting thus, he came to Taleya, the Dismissor, who questioned him how he died, by the club or the strangling cord or the water, or naturally of disease or old age. Them that died of violence the Dismissor allows to pass, but them that died otherwise he commands to re-enter their bodies and die as befits a man; yet Nambitu obeyed not, so burned he to reach his resting-place on the Sacred Mount. Thus it is that they who fall to the ground from the heat of the sun or from sudden terror, sometimes return to life: the Dismissor has sent them back.

“And immediately Nambitu had passed the Dismissor, Rokowewe spied him, and shouted ‘*Ue! Ue! Ue!*’ and the twin goddesses Tinaiulu-ndungu and Muloathangi heard the shout, and shook out their nets ready for a sweep; and as the Shade approached they made a great sweep. And Nambitu, being a mighty warrior, overleapt the net like a kanathe fish, but coward Shades are entangled like the sumusumu, and the goddesses disentangle them from the meshes, and bite them on the head, and, looping up their nets, throw them into their baskets. These goddesses linger ever in the path listening for the sound of



"THE SHADE OF A WARRIOR OVERLEAPT THEIR NET LIKE A
KANATHE FISH."

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wailing in the villages below, for the sad sound is wafted to the Long Road, and they rejoice, laughing to one another, and shaking out the folds of their nets.

“Escaping from the Fisher-women, the Shade draws near the vasa tree at Naililili—the Hanging-place. From the branches of this tree hang like bats the Shades of little children, untimely born, waiting for their mothers to come and lead them onward. And they cry to every passing Shade—‘How are my father and my mother?’ If the Shade answers, ‘The smoke of thy mother’s cooking fire is set upright like a pillar,’ the child wails aloud, knowing that it still must wait, for its mother’s life is strong within her; but if the Shade answers, ‘Their hair is grey, and the smoke of their fire hangs along the ground,’ the child ghost laughs aloud, crying, ‘It is well! My mother will soon be here! Oh, let her hasten, for I am weary of waiting for her!’”

“Mark you that!” said Asenath. “They are wise, these bat-children, they call for their mothers whom they all know. If they waited until they recognized their fathers they would hang there to all eternity.”

“And now,” went on the ancient, “the Shade draws near the Calling-place for Kaile. In the

glen below the road two goddesses are boiling kaile, and they cry, 'A red or a white kaile?' If the Shade calls for a red kaile, they know him for the ghost of one slain in battle; but if he calls for a white kaile, it is the ghost of one who died by the strangling cord. Some Shades call for kaile from Burotu. These are they who have died a natural death. Many other things, too, are called from this place."

"As for me, I can eat none but the red sort," grumbled Lady Asenath.

"*Momo*, the dead are no choosers. And now the Shade nears Vuni-ngasau-leka—the Short Reed Clumps—and there he sits down to let those that followed overtake him. At this place the Shades recognize each other, and thenceforward travel in company for the rest of their journey. Therefore, the place is a by-word in quarrels on the earth. If one would tell another that he will not see his face, nor ever speak to him while they both live, he says, 'We two will never meet again until we meet at Vuni-ngasau-leka'—meaning that they will never meet again in this life.

"So the Shade reaches Naisausau—the Clapping-place. Once there was a village at this place, and the people say that they left it because of the noise the Shades made in clapping their hands.

Passing onward, the company of Shades came to Nainkoronkoro—the Place of Wonder, beneath which the whole land and sea lie spread, and there they stand and marvel at the world and all its works, the beauty, the pleasures and the sorrows, and the labours of it ; for there they gaze upon it for the last time before they pass onward to Nakauvandra, and the mountains hedge them about. And thence they journey to a place called Nai-savusavu-ni-weli—the Spitting-place—where every Shade must spit on the root of a certain tree. Near this spot is Nai-kanakana—the Eating-place—and there they tarry to eat. Now our fathers said that, when we dream that the spirit of a dead man is eating us, it signifies that his Shade has reached this place, and has found there the souls of us, the living, which he pursues with intent to devour. Therefore we say—‘Last night so and so ate me, and I shouted till I almost died.’ Having feasted on the souls of the living, the Shades pass onward to the spot called The-Hybiscus-for-Wiping-the-Face, where they break off hybiscus leaves and wipe their faces with them. The leaf will be black if it wipes the face of a man, and yellow if the Shade be a woman’s.”

“This at least is true,” cried Asenath. “This very night I was pursued by the Shade of Teacher

Vilikesa, but being very fat he caught me not, and I escaped. They said he went to the heaven of the foreigners, but I, having some knowledge of the man, always doubted it. Go on, Palm-water."

"At the turn of the road stands Delakurukuru—Thunder-hill,—the first of the god-fortresses, and the Shades enter the strangers' house to be entertained of the gods. And the young gods welcome them, and take them first to bathe, and then to view the wonders of the fortress—the dancing-ground and the white quicksand ; and while the feast is preparing, the young gods entertain them with dancing, reciting ballads of their heroic deeds. And the Shades are filled with shame that they know no song worthy to be sung before gods to repay their entertainment. In very shame they make the attempt ; but when they open their lips to sing, memory flows from them, the misery of their lot rushes in upon them, and their song becomes only a lament for the evil manner of their burial. This is what they sing :—

'My Lords ! In evil fashion are we buried,
Buried staring up into heaven :
We see the-scud flying across the sky,
We are worn out with the feet stamping in the earth ;
Our ribs, the rafters of our house, are crushed asunder ;
Our eyes with which we gazed at one another are turned
round to show the whites ;

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The nose with which we kissed has fallen in ;
The breast to which we embraced is ruined ;
The thighs with which we clasped have fallen away ;
The mouth with which we laughed at one another is fretted
with decay ;
The teeth with which we bit have showered down ;
Gone is the hand that threw the tinka stick ;
The hawks' stones have rolled away ;
Rolled away are the blunTERS of razors.
Hark to the lament of the mosquito !
Well it was that they should die and pass onward,
But, alas for their ears which were the conch shell I loved
to sound.
Hark to the lament of the fly !
Well it was that they should die and pass onward,
But, alas ! they have taken with them the eye from which I
drank.
Hark to the lament of the black ant !
Well it was that they should die and pass onward,
But, alas for my whale's tooth that they have stolen away !'

"In singing this lament the Shades hope to excite the anger of the gods against us mortals that are still alive, and against the whole race of mosquitoes and flies and black ants ; for the dead are ever malignant towards the living. But the gods only cry—' Liku tangoi ya io ! ' which signifies in the language of the Immortals—' The burial that they practise in the world is good enough. Shall we condemn it because of a song like this ? ' "

Asenath's ear was quick to catch the erotic symbolism of the song.

"Sing they thus?" she laughed. "Sing they of the hawks' stones, and the blunters of razors, and of the black ant's whale's tooth? Whale's tooth, forsooth! The black ant loves to jest. But, children, I fear the stamping in. See that no one stamps on my grave. Leave the earth loose: it will settle when the rains come."

For some moments the silence was broken only by the rasping of Palm-water's nails as he scratched his scaly calves. The rest were silent. Then Asenath spoke again—"Whither went Nambitu from Thunder-hill?"

"*E Momo*, all that night he rested, and on the morrow journeyed onward towards Nakauvandra, together with a great company of Shades. They saw the plains no more, mountain tops being about them on every side, and tall forest trees closing in the road. The gods of Nandi could no longer molest them, for now they were in a foreign country, and ever and anon the Shades from the valleys below joined them, from Ba, from Bulu, from Naloto, from the villages of Nadrau and Na Vatusila, which are on the head-water of the Great River; and, when they reached the high ridge that lies above Rakiraki, they quickened their pace, singing as they went, for here the lofty God-dwellings of Nakauvandra burst again upon their view,

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and they passed the first guardian of the Fortress, and saw the road sloping upward even to the gateway of the city, and with one accord they shouted the tama, and the sentinel on the ramparts answered their salutation, and announced their coming to the gods that are within, and their singing and their jesting were hushed, and they lowered their voices from awe of the Lords of the God-city. So they pass in through the first gateway in the wall of Vesi, which Rokola and his carpenters erected in the old time, when the great Dengei made war upon them. So they passed in, and the gates were shut behind them, and their labours and their sorrows and the perils of the way were at an end for ever, for there they rest."

"And I, Palm-water, what entertainment shall I have in Nakauvandra?" asked Lady Asenath.

"*E Momo*," whined the old man, "of this our elders told us nothing, for the Shades have entered the God-city, and whether they serve the gods there, or labour in the plantations, where the yams and plantains and yankona grow so vast that no mortal is strong enough to lift them, or whether they lie at ease all their days and spend their nights in feasting and dancing dances taught them by the Immortals, we know not, for none have ever returned to tell."

“Labour in the plantations, forsooth!” cried Asenath; “I for one will labour in no plantation, be it Dengei’s himself. Have I lived all these years to be a scraper of the yam-hills through eternity? If the gods have no better use for me than this, then let me, with such skill as they give me, beat on a wailing-chest in the heaven of the foreigners. Thus do the white ladies disport themselves after death, beating unceasingly on the wailing-chest they call ‘piano.’ I thought that in Nakauvandra we old women received back the forces of our youth, as that liar, He-Who-Speaks-But-Once, promised when I drank of his sacred gin-bottle. In Nakauvandra there be young gods, and what shall they do if there be no maidens with whom to frolic? How shall they spend the moon-lit nights if not in feasting and dancing? With a city full of the Shades of fair and well-born damsels ready to their hand, they can set them to no better use than scratching yam-hills? Truly they must be a dull-witted folk, these gods!” She paused for breath; her eye had caught something of its old humour as she trailed all that poor old Palm-water venerated in the mire. “Surely,” she said at last, “we shall not stay for ever in Nakauvandra. What of Naithombothombo?”

“Aye, *Momo*. Some say that Nakauvandra is

but a halting-place in the journey, and that thereafter the Shades journey to Naithombothombo, the Jumping-Off-Place, there to leap into the Western Ocean. Who knows? None has come back to tell. Our fathers long ago believed it, but the mists of time have obscured the truth. Some say that a swift current carries them westward, beyond the Water-Hole in which the Sun dives to cool himself every night ; and about them sport the dolphins, tumbling joyously in the warm sea ; and the frigate-birds wheel overhead, crying to them to have courage, for their haven is near ; and the sea grows calm, and the sun shines brighter without burning them ; and the salt is washed from the sea-water till it is sweet to drink, so that their bodies do not swell, nor the skin of their faces smart for the spray. Then they see before them a bright shore of white sand stretching cool to the fringe of trees, god-trees higher than yon Sambeto mountains, so laden with giant fruits that the boughs crack under them ; and as they near the shore, they see pleasant glades, and yam-beds wherein the yam-vines wither to harvest with never a hand to till them, giant yams which four men together would not suffice to lift ; wherein all the fruits we know, and many besides, grow wild, and rot for lack of mouths to eat them. And the

houses tower aloft like yonder hills, decked with buli shells that dazzle the eyes. And the children splashing in the shallow water see them, and they cry aloud, and forth from the houses troop the chiefs of old, our Ancestors, and sit decorously on the shore while Waicalanavanua, their spokesman, stands in their midst, and bids the swimmers welcome. Then they feel the bottom and wade ashore; and fair maidens run to wipe the water from their limbs; and they are glad, for they are in their own land at last, where there are no foreigners, nor missionaries, nor Government, nor taxes, and they are all chiefs together and equal with the chiefs. There they rest and feast for ever. Thus said our fathers—In the West lies the land of our origin, and to the West we go at last! *E Momo*, all this my mother told me, yet who knows if it be true, seeing that none has returned to tell?"

The Lady's breath was coming in short gasps. The flesh had shrunk tight over her cheekbones, and her eyes gleamed unnaturally bright.

"Children," she said at last, turning painfully towards the shrinking girls, "before this moon wanes you shall know whether it be true. If I go by the long road to Nakauvandra, and pass Taleya, the Dismissor, and overleap the nets of the Fisherwomen, I will come back and tell you how the gods,

our fathers, pass the days and nights in their mountain city. If they live not joyously, they are fools. And if it comes to me to leap into the Western Sea from Naithombothombo, and to be welcomed on the fair shore of Burotu, where the fruits of the earth ripen without tillage, then will I come back to tell you some moonlit night, when you are sporting on the dancing ground. After that, I will go back to teach the Shades of our fathers sports undreamed of in their day—sports I have learned in Tonga and the eastern islands with certain improvements of my own. ‘Burotu,’ they will say, ‘was a pleasant land; but since this Nandi woman came among us it is a land of intoxicating delight.’ Only see that they do not stamp upon my grave to mar me.”

She drew the coverlet closer about her, shivering a little though the night was hot. They brought another blanket to lay on her, and one reached her hand to the lamp to turn it down. But the sick woman shook her head, and they left the light. Presently she turned her face to the wall, and they thought she was asleep. She remained thus until a cock on the outskirts of the village crowed a challenge which was taken up by a dozen others far and near. The dawn was at hand. The girls conversed in low whispers, warming their tobacco

leaves over the embers, and passing lighted cigarettes from one mouth to the other. Was she really dying? Would the teacher attend the funeral? or were they to bury her secretly with heathen rites? She was very quiet. Some one should run for the Buli, though she hated him, and he had never crossed her threshold since his appointment in her husband's stead. Still, the Government was the Government.

A voice startled them, a strained, weak voice that they scarce recognized. "Rarathi," it called, and the Pussy-cat replied to her native name; "Rarathi, you are to have my chest, and all that it contains. You are a fool. Sitiveni is a good lad, and you have driven him by your folly into the arms of other girls." The voice stopped between the sentences with a sharp catch of the breath. The Pussy-cat began to blubber like a girl of ten.

"Ruth," said the voice again, "you too are a fool; your looks are leaving you. See that you sink not to greater folly. The mats and the ngatu are yours. I will have no quarrelling over my property."

Each of the girls received her legacy dashed with a word of plain-spoken advice. And then the poor body on the bed struggled over to face them.

“Palm-water,” said the voice. The old reprobate was rolling a cigarette with his palsied fingers at the fire-place, and dropped it with a start. “Palm-water, shall we not drink a last bowl together?”

The root was dragged from its corner, and cut up into convenient squares; the great bowl was unhooked from its peg in the eaves; the girls, still snivelling, solemnly munched their quids of root, passing the lumps from time to time into the bowl. Then the water gurgled from the gourd. Ruth stirred the muddy liquid with her brown fingers, and dipped the fibrous strainer, and old Palm-water was galvanized into life. In a high nasal whine he set up the old yankona chant—a chant so old that the very meaning of the words is now forgotten; a chant passed down by those Ancients who had braved the terrors of the “Long Road” countless generations ago. Rocking his wrinkled body, beating the air with his lean arms, he quavered in a notation impossible to describe as either major or minor, marking his phrases with spasms of weird energy. The smoky lamplight reddened his scaly skin, his bleared eyes took on a dull phosphorescence; even the girls shrank from this incarnation of the orgies of a vanished past. The quavering voice seemed to be calling the terrible denizens of the Long Road from the Infinite; they started at

every rustle in the thatch lest Nino, the Peering-goddess, should be gnashing her teeth at them, or the Fisher-goddesses should shake out their looped nets. And just as the strainer cracked as Ruth wrung the last drop from it, a heavy foot stumbled on the threshold, and a fierce hand thrust aside the door-screen.

The girls shrieked and cowered. Surely this was Tatovu himself with his dreadful axe ready on his shoulder! Old Palm-water's voice died away in the middle of a phrase, like a village organ whose blower has let the wind run out, and he gazed speechless towards the door. For there, like a fresh breeze from his own mountains, stood Bishop Wesele taking in the scene. He did not frown,—it was not Wesele's way to frown,—though he had seen many sights that would have knit the brows of lesser men; he only smiled a little scornfully and exclaimed—

“*Veka, veka*, these are indeed great doings! Why, this is my old friend Palm-water. Let us shake hands, my old chum. We last met in church—many, many years ago. Teaching the girls to sing hymns, were you? Ah, what a voice you had!”

Thus far the old man stood the fire of banter, concealing the fact that he was ill-at-ease in the

presence of a clergyman ; but when he heard the Pussy-cat begin to titter he struck his colours, and crawled on all fours to the door, disappearing into the night. The air seemed clearer when he was gone. Then the Bishop's manner changed.

"Are any of you thuru-singa—communicants?" he inquired.

The girls looked blankly at each other, and produced a chit of fourteen from the background.

"Her name?" asked the Bishop blandly.

"Na-serau-ni-kalokalo (the Glimmer-of-the-Stars), sir," they whispered. Her slender form seemed to bow under the weight of the word.

"Well, Glimmer-of-the-Stars," said the Bishop, "little girls who sing devil-songs in the small hours are usually punished for it. Bigger girls, who have been communicants, and lost the distinction" (here he swept his eye round the circle, and the Pussy-cat picked at the mats), "and lead their sisters into sin, are shameless, and therefore past punishing. To bed with you."

Poor Glimmer-of-the-Stars vanished as if she had been put out. The Bishop pointed to the kava-bowl and to the door. Ready hands seized it, and the precious liquor flushed the foundation stones. Then the eye that missed nothing marked a whale's tooth on Asenath's coverlet, and a jam

tin of black powder lying on the mat where Palm-water had been sitting.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "and what were these for? Speak up, Ruth; I know what you are whispering. The powder was to blacken the face of a dying woman; the whale's tooth was for her soul to throw at the Pandanus-tree. I thought so. You idiots!" He laughed aloud. Then he went tenderly to the bed-place, and took Asenath's hand. "*Veka!*" he said heartily, "they have been frightening you, old friend. When the doctor comes——"

"It is all over, Wesele," she murmured faintly. "The curse of the staff is heavy on me. I am for the Long Road."

"The Long Road? What, have they been telling you those foolish old tales of a Pandanus-tree, and Tatovu, and the Fisher-women? Asenath, do you remember He-Who-Speaks-But-Once? I was in trouble then, and you delivered me. I have come to repay you now. I know this Long Road well. I travelled it but yesterday, coming to Sambeto, and a sorry road it was. My limbs ache from it still. I threw a stone at the Pandanus-tree in jest, and missed it, yet have I no suspicions of my wife, who, as you know, is not well-favoured and no longer young. I drank too of the Water

of Solace, and it consoled me not, being full of rotting leaves. No Fisher-women spread their nets for me, else should I not be here, for to save my life I could not leap like a kanathe fish. And when I stood up from drinking, and looked towards Nakauvandra, I saw no lofty dwellings of the gods, but only the barrenest hill-top in the country. Why, old friend, have you forgotten the Water-of-Life that deceiver Dungumoi kept in the square bottle?"

The lady's eyes caught a gleam of their old fun, and she murmured, "Aye, and his Immortality Maidens."

"Never mind them! Now, if that deceiver had prated of the Fisher-women, and Nino of the Gnashing Teeth, would you have believed him? How much the less this kava-besotted old fool Palm-water, who talks of his Ancestors of the dark age as if they were wiser than we who have the light! No doubt he said that your sickness was the curse of that rotten staff. You see I know about that folly of the Nanga."

"Better so than to be told that it is a judgment for my sins, as the teacher said."

"It is neither. Sins are not punished by sickness in this life, but by fire in the place of torment, where there are no revels nor dancing, unless it be

because the floor of that place is hot. But for the penitent there is Heaven, pleasanter far than Nakauvandra or Burotu."

"The place is full of white ladies, beating on pianos and singing hymns," pouted Asenath.

The Bishop knit his brows. The picture of eternal bliss drawn by his missionary was certainly untempting to a person of Lady Asenath's tastes. Then his native resource came to his aid, a splendid heresy flashed across his mind ; and, sinking his voice so as to keep his unorthodoxy a secret between them, he said that Heaven was a land so large that there was room for each to choose his company, and that there was bliss for each in the particular shape his ideals had moulded it. This was a startling doctrine to unfold to one of Asenath's school of philosophy.

"And I shall have my youth again?" she asked in round-eyed wonder.

The Bishop cleared his throat. "Undoubtedly," he said, after some hesitation, "provided that your repentance is heartfelt."

"I know I am a sinner. I told the foreign gentlemen so when I was a witness. Curious questions they were that they put to me." (Her mind was wandering.) "Yes, I have greatly sinned, not from love of wickedness, but because of some-

thing in my inside. But I do most heartily repent of every sin I have knowingly committed, though to make life pleasant for the young I hold to be no sin at all. Of two of my sins I do most heartily repent me. When I made poor Michael dance with my maidens in the Nanga, giving thus a handle to his enemies in the Church; and when I allowed my nephew, Man-o'-War, to wed that Tonga woman, who gives him no rest, I was very blameworthy."

The Bishop used the bond of good-fellowship between them as if his every word should be the last he should speak to her. He knew his people too well to entertain any hope of her recovery, for whenever he made light of her sickness she shook her head, and told him the hour of her death with the calmness of quiet certainty, this being the one matter in which the mind of her race has the mastery over the body. She was not afraid to die, whether she had to brave the terrors of the Long Road or the Judgment. She could have wished to live a little longer, for life had been pleasant. But she had lived it to the full, and it is not given to the gayest of us to live it twice.

The good Bishop used all his eloquence to convince her of her peril, but with one who knows no higher virtue than to give pleasure and no lower

vice than to give pain, who, loving all mankind with the same unselfish, maternal solicitude, has no enemies to forgive, there is very little to take hold upon. Hers was a careless, gracious, pagan code, and its very simplicity baffled the most skilful efforts at exposing it in its naked indigence. And in the end he had to admit his defeat in a compromise that might have cost a lesser man his preferment in the Church.

"Oh, my friend," he said, "if you care not for your own soul, think of the evil you will do to these, who, seeing their mistress dying unrepentant, will never listen to us more. Think, too, how you will shame me before my clergy!"

Asenath's heart was touched. "What would you have me do?" she murmured.

"Tell them that you die believing the truth, and that you would have me read the service at your burial."

"Wesele, I love you much, and I would that you were better mated, for your wife, I know well, is a shrew. Let there be agreement between us. For my part I will do what you ask; for your part you shall lay that whale's tooth on my breast when I am dead, not, indeed, that I would put Luke's constancy to the test, or that I desire his company, but lest, having nothing to throw at the Pandanus-

tree, I be shamed before the other Shades. It can do no harm, for if I go to Judgment, as you say, I will drop the tooth surreptitiously while they are leading me to the court-house. Promise this, and I will speak to my people even now."

The Bishop groaned, but gave the promise, and at her behest sent girls to call the people to her bedside. One by one they came, old and young, men and women, Palm-water and his heathen brotherhood, Man-o'-War and his band of roisterers. When the house was packed, and those who were too late to find room were squatting outside with their ears to the reedwork walls, Bishop Wesele addressed them.

"My friends, this is a night of grief, to me no less than to you. Our dear friend Asenath, feeling the approach of death, has a mind to speak to you. Death is grievous, but it is less terrible when she who is called away dies repenting of her sins, and confident of her resurrection. Listen then to her testimony, and bear it in your hearts."

The sick woman signed to Ruth to raise her in her arms; the heads swayed forward like rushes ruffled by the wind; the wheeze of an old man was painfully audible in the silence.

"Children," she began, in a voice that gathered strength with every sentence, "I am dying. When

you leave this house you will prepare, and portion out my death-feast. My time is come. No more shall I watch your sports, or share in your pleasures. To-morrow night you will be weeping for me, and your grief will not be assuaged until I drink of the Water of Solace"—(the Bishop laid a warning hand upon her)—"What am I saying? until I am led to Judgment. Wesele tells me that my sins are numberless, and since he understands these things, he must be right. If there be any here who bears me malice for any evil I have done him, let him speak, let him forgive. None of you has need of my forgiveness, for none has ever wrought me evil that I can remember. You are silent. Some of you are weeping. Nevertheless, I have greatly sinned, for Wesele says so, and he knows. I do repent me of my sins. I plucked the staff from the Nanga at Navula, and I am justly punished. Take heed from my punishment how you tamper with things accursed." (Another touch from the Bishop.) "Be not as I have been. Go to church with regularity. Drink no kava on the Sabbath. Give liberally to the Mission. Know you what they say on the eastern coast, that Narewa is the wickedest village in all Viti? Know you that preachers use us for a text? See to it that they have no further excuse."

She paused for breath, and her eye fell upon a youth sitting in an attitude of deep dejection. "I know your thoughts, Rusiate. It is this that grieves me most. There are many youths among you who sigh for maidens, and maidens who use a foolish coyness to conceal their love. Rusiate and Litia, Alivereti and Natombe, who will smooth your way when I am gone? To you, silly girls, I say, 'Beware of pride.' When you hear the voices of the night—" (Again the Bishop must have touched her, for she broke off.)—"Ah! I had forgotten. At my burial there must be no heathen practices, mind that!—no blackening of the face, no lopping of fingers, no smashing of drinking vessels, no abstinence from food under the tabu. Are we not all church-goers? It is my will that Wesele officiate at my funeral. You must bury me under the great nokonoko trees at Navindi, in a grave reared with stones, and white sand sprinkled over all. Thus there will be no need to trample it down. If you like to stand empty bottles on it with flowers in them, that is your affair, only, my children, do not stamp upon the grave to mar me and shame me before—before the Judgment. And mark this! When I have been wrapped in the shroud let all go out, and leave Wesele to pray by my body." She glanced meaningly at the whale's

tooth protruding from the folds of the Bishop's sulu.

Then her voice grew harsh from strong emotion. "Oh, children, I am going forth all cold and naked from the world to wander alone, who knows whither? You, my girls, would fain follow me, but you may not. Alone must I go forth among strangers who know me not. Would that I could stay with you! You will be sporting in the warm sea, and laughing over the kava, bowl, and meeting on the dancing-ground on moonlit summer nights. Do not forget me; for perchance on some such night my spirit will fly back to tread the measure with you. Where I am going there will be no delights like this. I am a church-goer, and the Long Road is not for me, nor Burotu, that pleasant shore where the soul is sated with delights. Far other is the place whither I am going—a strange land, without trees, or fruits, or feasting, or dancing; a land, if I mistake not, bare like the inside of a church, wherein they sing hymns, and beat unceasingly upon the piano. Thither must I go, unless, indeed, I am cast into the flaming pit where the traders are, which Wesele thinks unlikely, since I have done no one any injury, and have repented of my sins. Children, I shall never see Burotu, but perhaps my knowledge of the place

may serve me in the place whither I am journeying. In Tonga they sneered at me for a western savage until I had taught them somewhat ; then they said that Tonga was a pleasanter land since I had visited it, and it may be the same hereafter. It may even be that I shall teach the sports of Nandi to them that know them not. Therefore, children, I beseech you, mar me not by stamping on my grave."

What more she would have said cannot be known, for the Bishop, with his customary tact, snatched the opportunity of her pause for breath. "She is faint," he said, "and naturally, with the house packed like a fish-fence. Lay her down and fan her, and let all go out but her own household. Mark you how she burns with fever !"

He spoke truly. Emotion had rallied Asenath's waning forces to the task of speech ; her eyes glowed like torches from her wasted face, her breath was labouring, her fingers worked convulsively. The reaction came, and for many hours she lay so still that they thought her dead already, until they looked into her eyes. Through the day Wesele watched by her, while the others came and went, and the girls sat about the fire-place, cooking, smoking, weeping, as the humour took them. From the village square came the squeal of pigs

and the thud of axes; the men were preparing ovens for the funeral feast.

All that day the air had been very still, and so clear that the Isles of Mamanutha were brought unnaturally near. In the untempered sunshine the plain was heated like an iron plate, the glassy sea heaved labouringly as if it gasped for breath. But towards sunset a change came. There was a muttering in the woolly pile of cloud massed about Koromba peak, cold gusts swept down across the plain, presaging a thunderstorm, though it was the trade-wind season, when thunderstorms are scarcely known. Night fell like a black curtain, and with night heavy goutts of rain spattered the dusty earth, storm-clouds whistled up the sky, and men ran shouting to their houses chilled to the marrow.

Towards evening the sick woman grew restless, crying every moment to be helped into a fresh position, plucking at her coverlet with nervous, wasted fingers. The storm burst with lightning that split the darkness and thunder that rocked the solid earth. The girls cowered over the fire, whispering fearfully that the Heavens were calling for their mistress. "They are calling the Momo!" they whimpered as they clung together, terrified at each irruption of some dripping wretch through the door-screen.

Through the hissing of the rain between two thunder-claps the Bishop heard his name. He bent his head towards the bed. "Wesele," said the dying woman, "it thunders. I fear to venture forth on such a night!" And presently—"It will be very cold waiting there on the bank at Lelele in the rain." Another flash, spitting blue rays through every crevice in the thatch, lit up her features, ghastly, terror-stricken, and she cried aloud—"A tambua! A tambua!—The whale's tooth! The whale's tooth!" And then the thunder crashed again, the storm attained its highest fury, and in the storm her spirit passed.

Then, with the tempest rolling westward, were mingled wild despairing cries—cries that would have reached the ears of the dread Fisher-women waiting with looped nets on the Long Road; such cries as custom prescribes, that now died down to a single wail, and anon burst out again in frantic chorus. And all the while weeping women carried in and set orderly the death-feast, apportioning the food with calm decorum, and stifling their own cries with lumps of steaming meat. And when the corpse-women had washed and oiled the body, and rolled it in its gnatu shroud, and wrapped it in costly Yasawa mats, and bound it all with sinnet, the girls told of her dying words. Then,

whispering among themselves, they fetched a huge tusk, yellow with age, and an old crone crept towards the body, muttering some heathen incantation. But before she reached it a heavy hand was laid upon her shoulder, and the Bishop spoke—

“Have you so soon forgotten the last words she spoke to you, how she enjoined you to practise no heathen rites upon her? And now you would desecrate her poor body with this foolishness! Know you not that she has gone to a land where there is no Ferryman, nor Pandanus-tree, nor any heathen folly? Shame upon you! Out of the house, every one, and leave me to pray with her as she commanded!”

When all were gone forth he was left alone, with the firelight flickering on the remnants of the feast, and on the still form lying swathed in its shroud. The storm rolled away to seaward, and the moist air was vibrating with the persistent tremolo of the crickets. For many minutes he sat motionless. Tears were running down into his beard, his lips moved, and he glanced guiltily at the door, as if he were embarked upon some shameful enterprise. His fingers were fumbling with the folds of his sulu, alternately drawing forth and concealing the ivory tusk. Then he bowed his head to the mats, and prayed. But his purpose was fixed. Once he

THE PASSING OF ASENATH

leaned towards the body, and, with a quick inhalation, kissed the shroud, and then drew forth the ivory, and thrust it swiftly into the folds about the breast. This was his farewell. When he went forth softly into the night his heart was easier. For what could it matter, seeing that his old friend already knew the truth?—that the Pandanus-tree, and the Water of Solace, and the dreadful Fisherwomen, and that pleasant Shadow-land, Burotu, were but the phantoms of a vain, unmeaning dream?

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